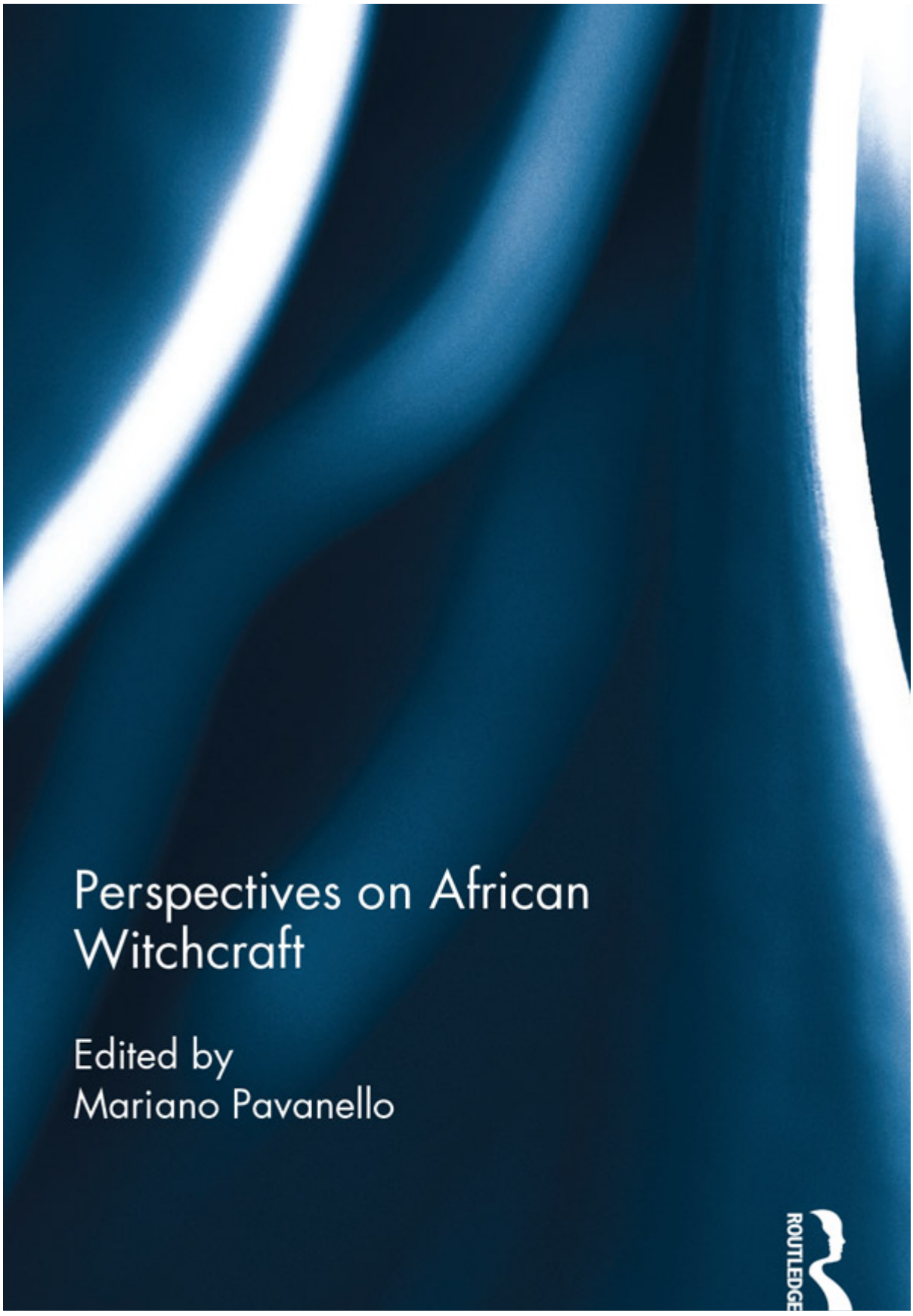
Perspectives on African Witchcraft

Edited by
Mariano Pavanello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ROUTLEDGE

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This volume draws on a range of ethnographic and historical material to provide insight into witchcraft in Sub-Saharan Africa. The chapters explore a variety of cultural contexts, with contributions focusing on Cameroon, Central African Republic, Ghana, Mali, Ethiopia and Eritrean diaspora. The book considers the concept of witchcraft itself, the interrelations with religion and medicine, and the theoretical frameworks employed to explain the nature of modern African witchcraft representations.

Mariano Pavanello is a former professor of anthropology at Sapienza University of Rome and former head of the Department of History, Cultures and Religions at the university.

Perspectives on African Witchcraft

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Notes on contributors

Roberto Beneduce, MD, PhD, anthropologist and psychiatrist, is Professor of Medical and Psychological Anthropology at the University of Turin (Department of Culture, Politics and Society) and Director of the Frantz Fanon Center, Turin. His research engages various intellectual fields, including social violence and the current religious imaginaries, witchcraft and traditional medicine in Sub-Saharan Africa (Mali, Cameroon, and Mozambique), migration and refugee issues, and the history of ethnopsychiatry. More particularly, his research aims at connecting traumatic past and current experience of dispossession with witchcraft ideology and ritual healing in Sub-Saharan Africa. He is the author of various books and essays published in international journals. Among his recent works: "Traumatic pasts and the historical imagination: Symptoms of loss, postcolonial suffering, and countermemories among African migrants" (*Transcultural Psychiatry*, 2016); *L'Histoire au corps. Mémoires et archives incorporés dans les cultes de possession en Afrique* (Fribourg: Academic Press, Studia Instituti Anthropos, 2016); *Corpi e saperi indocili. Guarigione, stregoneria e potere in Camerun* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2010); "Fantasmagories de la cure. Images de rédemption, routinisation de la vision et "textes cachés" dans les thérapies rituelles" (*Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 2013); "Un imaginaire qui tue. Réflexions sur sorcellerie, violence et pouvoir (Cameroun, Mali)", in *Sorcellerie, violence et pouvoir en Afrique*, edited by J. Bouju and C. Martinelli (Paris: Karthala, 2012); "Soigner l'incertitude au Cameroun. Le théâtre épique du nganga face aux défis de la professionnalisation et aux économies du

miracle", in *Le pluralisme médical en Afrique: hommage à Éric de Rosny*, edited by Ludovic Lado (Paris: Karthala, 2010).

Andrea Ceriana Mayneri is a researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) and a member of the Institut des mondes africains (IMAF). He received his PhD in anthropology from the Aix-Marseille University in France (2010) and has been postdoctoral fellow at the Laboratory for a Prospective Anthropology (University of Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium), at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, at the Museum of Quai Branly in Paris. Andrea Ceriana Mayneri has published book chapters and journal articles about the Central African Republic and the propagation of witchcraft beliefs and antiwitchcraft practices. He is notably the author of *Sorcellerie et prophétisme en Centrafrique: l'imaginaire de la dépossession en pays banda* (Paris: Karthala, 2014). Ceriana Mayneri is currently working in Chad in the capital city N'Djamena and among Central African refugees.

Osvaldo Costantini received his PhD from Sapienza University of Rome. He carried out research among Eritrean and Ethiopian Pentecostals in Rome. His focus is on the ways in which Pentecostal language allows people to confront the difficulties and the uncertainties of their lives within a new context and the relationship between conversion to Pentecostalism and the hostile past of the two countries. Among his recent works: "Rifugiati politici eritrei a Roma. Retoriche del trauma, discorso umanitario e strategie quotidiane di rappresentazione" (*AM Rivista Italiana della Società di Antropologia Medica*, 2012); "Quando sono partito io. Memoria individuale e memoria collettiva nei racconti di viaggio dei rifugiati eritrei" (*Archivio Antropologico del Mediterraneo*, 2012); "An informal way to social protection" (in *Cultural Landscapes of Ethiopia: Conference Proceedings*, edited by D. Narendra *et al*. Mekelle: Mekelle University Printing Press, 2015); "And now I am Eritrean". Mobilization Strategies and Multiple Sense of Belonging between Local Complexity and Global Immobility" (in *Bounded Mobilities. Ethnographical Perspectives on Social Hierarchies and Global Inequalities*, edited by I. Gotz *et al*., 2015, forthcoming); "I have not mental problems: I believe in Jesus Christ". Malattia mentale,

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Angelantonio Grossi received his Master's Degree in anthropology at Sapienza University of Rome. Interested in digital media, cosmopolitanism and the North-South relationship, Angelantonio Grossi conducted a digital ethnographic fieldwork in Accra. His dissertation concerned the political and religious aspects of the Internet in Ghana.

Mariano Pavanello has taught ethnology, social anthropology and Africanistics in the University of Pisa (1977–2003) and Sapienza of Rome (2004–2013) where he was Head of the Department of History, Cultures, Religions from 2010 to 2013. He carried out fieldwork in many African countries since 1973; his more important field research was among the Nzema of Ghana (1989–2013). Mariano Pavanello is the author of various books, among which: *Le società acquisitive e i fondamenti razionali dello scambio* (Milano: Angeli, 1993); *Il formicaleone e la rana* (Napoli: Liguori, 2000); *Chiefs in Development in Ghana* (with Arhin Brempong, Legon: Institute of African Studies, 2006); *Il segreto degli antenati* (Pavia: Altravista, 2007); *Fare antropologia. Metodi per la ricerca etnografica* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 2010). He published several papers in international journals, among which: "The work of the Ancestors and the Profit of the Living" (*Africa Journal of the International African Institute*, 1995); "L'événement et la parole. La conception de l'histoire et du temps historique dans les traditions orales africaines: le cas des Nzema" (*Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 2003); "Reconsidering Ivor Wilks's "Big Bang" Theory of Akan history" (*Ghana Studies*, 2011); "Foragers or Cultivators? A Discussion of Wilks's Big Bang Theory of Akan History" (*Journal of West African History*, 2015). Mariano Pavanello promoted and directed the project of the "Fort Apollonia Museum of the Nzema Culture and History", which officially opened on 30 October 2010.

Pino Schirripa, PhD in ethno-anthropological sciences (Rome 1991), is Professor of Medical Anthropology and Religious Anthropology in the Sapienza University of Rome and director of the Italian Ethnological

Mission to Tigray – Ethiopia (since 2007) and of the Italian Ethnological Mission to Ghana (since 2013). Since 1989, he has been doing fieldwork in Africa (Ghana, 1989–1998 and 2013 onwards; Ethiopia 2007 onwards) studying Pentecostal and Charismatic churches; Nzema (Ghana) traditional medicine and religion; health systems and politics of care in Ghana and Ethiopia; and finally production, distribution and perception of biomedical and traditional pharmaceuticals. In Italy, he has done fieldwork on Catholic Charismatic communities and on pharmaceuticals. He is chair of the Medical Anthropology Network within EASA, and member of the board of the Italian Association of Medical Anthropology (SIAM) and of the Italian Association of African Studies (ASAI). Among his books and articles: *La vita sociale dei farmaci. Produzioni, circolazione, percezioni degli oggetti materiali della cura*, Lecce, forthcoming; *Terapie Religiose. Neoliberismo, cura, identità nel pentecostalismo contemporaneo*, Rome, 2012 (editor); *Research Materials on Traditional Medicine in the Nzema Area (Ghana)*, Legon, 2011 (editor with Mariano Pavanello); *Health System, Sickness and Social Suffering in Mekelle (Tigray – Ethiopia)* Berlin, 2010 (editor); *Le politiche della cura. Terapie, potere e tradizione nel Ghana contemporaneo*, Lecce, 2005.

Elisa Vasconi, PhD in medical anthropology (University of Siena), carried out her research in Ghana and Uganda on traditional medicine, public health systems, anthropology of pharmaceuticals, witchcraft and development anthropology. She is currently teaching "Development Anthropology" at the University of Florence. In the years 2010 to 2012, she taught "Cultural Anthropology" and "Medical Anthropology" as visiting lecturer in the Department of Botany, Makerere University (Kampala, Uganda). Elisa Vasconi published several papers in Italian and international journals and edited two volumes with Prof. Mariano Pavanello: *La promozione della salute e il valore del sangue. Antropologia medica e Sanità Pubblica* (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2011); and *Prospettive di studi africanistici in Italia. In memoria di Bernardo Bernardi* (*L'Uomo. Società Tradizione Sviluppo*, 2011, Sapienza University of Rome).

Foreword

The project of this book was launched during a workshop held on 30 November – 1 December 2012 in the Department of History, Cultures, Religions of the University of Rome "La Sapienza". Participants in the seminar were: Matteo Aria, Alice Bellagamba, Davide Casciano, Andrea Ceriana Mayneri, Osvaldo Costantini, Rev. John David K. Ekem, Alessandro Lupo, Birgit Meyer, Mariano Pavanello, Pino Schirripa and Elisa Vasconi. The purpose of the workshop, titled "Medicine, Religion, Witchcraft", was to discuss the interrelations between the three categories and fields of investigation in the perspective of contributing to the construction of a deeper anthropological and historical understanding of their reciprocal influences and cultural backgrounds. An implicit and certainly ambitious goal was that of touching on the epistemological problem of witchcraft and its historical reasons and cultural interpretations. However, more modestly, the workshop dealt with some key issues pertaining to the relations between medicine, religion and witchcraft, following the research lines carried out by the participants. The anthropological perspective was dominating the debate to the detriment of the historical analysis, and this book is partially aimed at correcting such a disciplinary bias.

Medicine, religion and witchcraft appear as three different and quite distinct domains of ideas, knowledge, practices and beliefs, as well as three separate fields of anthropological and historical investigation, characterized by rather independent objectives, methods and theoretical frameworks. The anthropological and historical interests in these three fields are crowded with questions and problems of political, economic, psychological and

philosophical nature that rise from each field separately rather than from the complex web of their interrelations. This book, focusing mainly on witchcraft, aims at exploring that web, though just very few of its multifarious aspects are set forth for discussion.

The completion of this collective work took a long time. Its present structure does not reflect exactly the 2012 workshop, and its scope and focus have slightly changed over time.

I wish to thank the participants to the workshop, and particularly the Rev. John David K. Ekem, Academic Dean of the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, who attended the meeting and presented the position of the Methodist Church of Ghana. A very special thanks I owe to Birgit Meyer, who accepted an invitation to act as a general discussant in the workshop. I wish to thank as well Matteo Aria, Alice Bellagamba, Davide Casciano and Alessandro Lupo for their contributions and critical discussion, though they could not follow up with a paper for the present book. Finally, I wish to thank the colleagues who have contributed to the present volume for their patient work, without which this book would have never been completed.

Last, but not least, I owe a special debt of gratitude to Elisa Vasconi for her invaluable help in the editing process.

Mariano Pavanello
April 2016

Introduction

Mariano Pavanello

Painful ethnographic memories

I had been conducting ethnographic research in the very most southwest strip of Ghana, in the region of the Nzema,[1] since 1989. In 2002, I left the Fort Apollonia guesthouse in the coastal town of Beyin and moved into a raffia hut in the village of Old Kabenlasuazo, in a narrow tongue of land between the ocean shore and the Domunli lagoon. Roughly 200 people lived there by cultivating, fishing and manually extracting coconut oil. The latter, which was the most common activity among the villagers and one of the most profitable in the Nzema area,[2] was managed by young men between the ages of 15 and 35. Old Kabenlasuazo was a very poor community, with no drinkable water or electricity, like many others in the region. Fishing was not always favorable, and when fishermen pulled their nets ashore, a crowd of kids threw themselves at the fish escaped from the nets in the attempt to catch them with tin bowls. The oil makers, helped by some women and kids, hand-pressed the coconut oil from fresh copra from just-smashed nuts. The fruit of two weeks' worth of hard work between two to three people, amounting to a 45 gallon barrel, could return roughly $120 for an $80 investment – the proceeds thus come to less than $40. The elderly in charge of plantations received the proceeds from the sale of coconuts at the end of the season, and the per capita income would not be more than $300 per year. In the spaces between plantations, women would cultivate manioc and other vegetables in small areas. A large number of pigs, fed with the oil-making residues, were kept in designated fenced areas

under the palm trees. Chickens and sheep roamed the village, together with some sparse cats and a couple of skinny dogs. In those years, I drove a car that would often break down, and having it fixed meant I had no other choice than to take it to some makeshift car workshop in the inland villages along the main road, usually with no success. Once I met a boy named Amo,[3] who occasionally worked in a workshop in the small town of Tikobo. He turned out to be accountable and honest and, when the Jomoro Mechanical Center in Bawiah (a workshop/school)[4] was fully implemented in 2003, I helped him get hired as a welder. By being able to make a decent living, Amo could eventually marry and lead a peaceful life. He was the youngest of four children and used to live with his old parents in a modest hut a few miles from Bawiah.

In 2006, as I was accustomed to doing, I spent a few months in those, by then, so-familiar places. Yet that year something horrible happened, something that deeply troubled me. While I was at the Bawiah workshop, somebody I knew told me that Amo's parents had been found almost unrecognizably burnt to death after their house caught fire. The police found out that they had been slaughtered before the fire. A few days later, I met Amo, but he could not recount what had really happened. A knot in his throat prevented him from speaking. I could put the pieces back together of what had happened by speaking with the chief of the local police in Tikobo. The heinous murder of Amo's parents was but one of numerous vicious acts that stained with blood the Nzema area during that time. Rumors were spreading about murders ordered by foreigners, almost certainly Nigerians. The region had, for a certain time, been driven through by commercial trucks coming from Nigeria with the goal of establishing a coconut trade. The coconuts were worth more in the neighboring country than on the local market. For this reason, many young workers lost their jobs with the rising price of coconuts. The manual production of coconut oil was going down, and a number of young men were pushed into illegal emigration. The chief of the police reported rumors about Nigerians lavishly paying for human blood and organs to be used in secret rituals. The director of the Jomoro Mechanical Center also confessed to me that, a few weeks earlier, one of his employees had been approached by a Nigerian truck-driver and had been told that the best way of becoming rich was by drinking somebody's warm blood, collected through slaughter as one does when sacrificing sheep,

while reciting a series of invocations to mighty spirits, brought from Nigeria by the truck-driver's countrymen.

This was not the only heinous crime happening to people I had contact with. Three years later, a young friend of mine, Anyimah, wrote to me about the death of his father, which had happened under very mysterious and tragic circumstances. At the time, Anyimah used to live in Tikobo. I had met him in 1998 when he was 15. Anyimah was the first son to a *ɔbahema*[5] and a man from Tikobo and was a very proper boy, familiar with the rules of the traditional customs. He came along during my peregrinations through the Nzema villages. During the following years, I entrusted him as an interpreter to some of my students in ethnographic research who were investigating with me in Ghana. Anyimah was taken in high esteem by my students and collaborators and became friend with several among them. When I saw him again in Ghana, after receiving his letter, in the summer of 2009, Anyimah told me a few months earlier his dad had left, as usual, for the countryside, where he used to work on a small plantation of his. That night, Anyimah's father did not come home, nor did he the day after. His disappearance was reported to the authorities, and the police started to investigate what happened. Anyimah's father's body was found a few days later in a remote swampy area. He had been slaughtered and stripped of his clothes, and his genitalia had been cut off. Anyimah, shedding tears from his eyes, told me that his father's blood and genitalia had certainly been used in a magic ritual of some sort, performed by the well-known Nigerians. He also suspected that a member of his paternal family could have played an essential role in the heinous crime.

The following year, 2010, I was told by Nyanzu, an old friend of mine from a coastal town, that a few weeks earlier a young man from a neighboring village had been discovered in the bush behind the beach while attempting to slaughter his 10-year-old little brother with a big knife. Some men passing by, among whom there was Nyanzu, and whose attention had been called by the screams of the little boy, succeeded in disarming the young man and preventing him from killing his brother. Once brought to the police station, the suspect confessed that he was attempting to perform a ritual that had been suggested to him by some Nigerian truck-drivers. The ritual involved the sacrifice of a close relative (preferably at a young age) and the collection of his or her blood in order to offer it to a mighty spirit that would confer the offerer the capacity of retching money.

I was facing events that were very different from typical ideas on witchcraft and the usual *juju* practices or sorcery common in that area.[6] The social and economic crisis determined by the fall of the coconut oil market and the overwhelming presence of Nigerians provided the perfect environment for the spreading of rumors and fears shaped as exotic witchcraft facts. However, these were real events that made the satanic beliefs and rumors of wealth acquired through the killing of very close relatives – common to many areas of Africa (cf. Meyer 1995) – awfully concrete. I found it intriguing that the police officially referred to these crimes as "witchcraft cases", but even more intriguing was the fact that many people would not refer to them as *ayɛne ndwɛkɛ*, i.e. witchcraft deeds. It seemed abnormal that the night cannibalism, supposedly practiced by witches, would leave the bodies slaughtered, drained of blood, burnt or mutilated. The *nyɛne* (witches) were always acting in a witchlike way (*ayɛne nu*, the witch's own way), eating the spiritual substance of their victims' flesh, whose bodies were found dead in their beds in the morning. Some people, referring to those murders, would rather speak of magic (*ngonyia*), the power belonging to spirits but also humans who could produce, through occult rituals (*gyifa*), marvelous and terrible effects. "Witchcraft?" said an old village chief, intensely looking at me with his interrogative gaze, and then added: "You don't know what witchcraft is. These are criminal murders."

Witchcraft: A kaleidoscope and an anthropological metanarrative

The explanation of those heinous crimes that had been long ravaging the Nzema region could not be found but in the exotic, foreign nature of the people presumably responsible for them: the Nigerians, well known for their magical practices and their extraordinary occult wisdom, which were connected to mighty spirits, capable of producing immense wealth. Nonetheless, the fears for impoverishment and desolation caused by the fall of the coconut oil market were not foreign to the unavowed inclination towards the occult powers coming from afar. Should we include the Nzema case in that horizon of occult economies widely celebrated in the social

sciences?[7] The reported cases seem to be consistent with the contemporary witchcraft survey in Sub-Saharan Africa and with the mainstream in contemporary anthropology, which embeds witchcraft in the 'dark' side of globalized capitalism. Kapferer's claim that "magic, sorcery and witchcraft lie at the epistemological centre of contemporary anthropology" and "project towards the far shores of human possibility" (Kapferer 2002a, p. 1) calls for going beyond Evans-Pritchard's rationalism. However, such an epistemological center is supposed to merely open the way to the significance of "sorcery and magic as revelations of the fabulations and transmutations of capital in globalising circumstances, and the magical character of nationalist discourses of the modern and post colonial state" (*Id*. p. 2).

Before going further, we have to disentangle a complex problem: the semantic puzzle and the historical transformations that made up witchcraft as an all-inclusive category and an all-explaining device. Resorting to evil magic with the aim of gaining wealth to the detriment of others may be defined as "that imaginal formation of force and power that is to be expected in social circumstances that are disjunctive or in some sense discontinuous" (Kapferer 2002a, p. 14). This rationalistic statement about sorcery and witchcraft is consistent with the sociological explanation of "how these stories highlight tensions, fears and social fractures during times of political instability and change" (Sumich 2010, p. 158) and recalls the functionalist analysis of colonial anthropology. These definitions and explanations miss the target of focusing on the subjective aspects of the human agency and making sense of the presumed irrational side of human life.

The definition of witchcraft immediately given by the police to describe the deeds that have been reported above is coherent with the usage of such a category made by the media and social scientists in a by now globalized discourse. It is generally assumed that "witchcraft is the attribution of causes of individual or collective distress to the other's evil-casting powers, acted in secret" (Bensa 2006, p. 47). Apart from the overlapping of concepts like witchcraft and sorcery,[8] we must conclude that witchcraft in English and *sorcellerie* in French have become passe-partout words that include all sorts of occult misdeeds, from evil eye to ritual murders.[9]

> The term witchcraft has become so generalized in everyday language that its meaning becomes increasingly vague and limitless. People seem to define witchcraft mostly in a negative way, as the antithesis of religion or moral order in general.
>
> (Geschiere 2013, p. xx)

The position of Behringer, who rejects any limited definition of witchcraft (Behringer 2004, pp. 1 ff.), should be taken to its logical conclusion: witchcraft is an empty concept that can only receive its semantic content from an arbitrary construction or by translation into a specific cultural/historical context. At the same time, the global discourse uses terms like witch, wizard, witch doctor[10] and sorcerer to denote imaginary or real actors of the occult as well as domestic or exotic practitioners of divination and healing. Witchcraft is invoked as the cause of misfortune, illness and premature death. Traditional healing is connected with a superior knowledge and power, which are often reputed as being very close to witchcraft. A healer who can cure diseases caused by a witch may be a witch him/herself, and a witch who can cause a disease can also cure it, confirming "the shifting character of conceptual distinctions and the ease with which one role fades into another (healer into witch and vice versa)" (Geschiere 2013, p. 104). Beneduce proposes a theoretical insight on this problem in the last chapter of the present volume.

In European cultures, from Antiquity to modern Europe,

> so intimate was the relationship between protective (or remedial) magic and malevolent witchcraft that historians have come to see them as the two inseparable halves of the world of popular culture. […] There was a precise sense in which magical healing and maleficent harming were linked in the popular mind – they were equivalents. It was assumed as a matter of course that those with the special power to heal by magic must know how to harm by the same means.
>
> (Clark 2002, p. 112)[11]

Ethnography makes numerous references to therapeutic practices in which naturalistic knowledge is inextricably linked to spiritual powers that are susceptible to also being used to harm. A paraethnographic example can be

drawn from my personal experience. In August of 2001, I was in Karamoja (Uganda),[12] precisely in the Northern District of Kotido in the Jie territory, and was a guest of a Catholic mission belonging to an Italian Congregation that has been present in that area since the 1930s. In agreement with local dioceses, the missionaries had organized a meeting in Kotido addressing the catechesis of women allegedly thought to be witches. I had the chance to read some letters, written in English and Italian, exchanged between the local mission and ecclesiastical authorities, in which the invited women were defined as witches and *streghe*.[13] In the letters, a conversion of the women, consequent to the cessation of their diabolic practice, was hoped for by the corresponders. The "witches", brought to Kotido by old coaches, arrived in great numbers from several different areas of the region. I took the chance to informally interview some of them. The women were, in fact, healers (*ngamurok*, sing. *amuron*),[14] and they practiced forms of therapy through the use of spiritual powers.

Witchcraft is a notion derived from European history, and its usages reply to the posture of observation we are used to referring to as Western subjectivity. A critique of this observational posture, and of the language it engenders, can take the stance from a quote by two scholars from Cameroon, reflecting on the meaning of the aforementioned European linguistic category:

> [… …] the word "witchcraft" does not refer to anything known in the local languages in Cameroon. It is difficult to find an equivalent that may translate it. One may think that it is a transplanted category, something put forth by an observer who is not familial to the context, that is the European contemplating a strange phenomenon whose nature and outline he is not in condition to perceive perfectly, but that resembles something already known. Therefore, he gives it a name that, by the magic of the word, can assimilate it to phenomena that are probably not what he believes. Claude Lévi-Strauss describes a similar operation in his *Le totémisme aujourd'hui* [*Totemism*. Translated from the French by Rodney Needham. Boston, Beacon Press, 1963].
>
> (Abega and Abe 2006, p. 34)

The European notion of witchcraft shows what the Europeans have thought of it, yet the indigenous categories of which witchcraft is credited to be the translation present themselves with remarkable elements of ambiguity. They are generally salient notions in the local discourse, although it is hard to define them conceptually when we are faced with no precise empirical or mental referent.[15] However, in order to escape the semantic labyrinth that is intrinsic to the indeterminacy of any translation, we do not need to dismantle the fuzzy category of witchcraft, as has been done with totemism. We must disengage the potentiality of being mistaken, which is rooted in the Western observational posture, when this dares to know the world exclusively through its own epistemic gaze and its own historic experience.[16] The so-called witchcraft of non-Western worlds has always been constructed by a biased cultural attitude, through analytical and interpretative schemas coherent with respectively different dominant paradigms in social sciences. As Bellagamba (2008, pp. 4–5) has pointed out:

> Ideas, practices and rituals – that in different times have been gathered under the more general concept of witchcraft – change through time together with the political, economic and cultural scenarios in which these practices, ideas and rituals have found and keep finding their place.

In other words, witchcraft, outlined through the categories of tradition and modernity – both being the ideological outcome of an ever-transitioning modernity – [17] turns into a mirror for anthropological metanarratives that are seen incorporating different local narratives and reflecting how our way of seeing the world constantly changes.

Until the first decades of the twentieth century, witchcraft was considered as a chapter of magic[18] and emerged as an autonomous object of academic research only in the second half of the 1930s. Indeed, as Clark argues:

> what this label [*magic*] actually designates remains highly elusive, since neither social scientists nor social historians have succeeded in defining it. This is because what magic has signified has varied from age to age

> and context to context. It is a classic example of a concept whose meaning and application are always a function of local circumstances.
>
> (Clark 2002, p. 105)

The theoretical split between witchcraft and magic taking place in the 1930s matched the epistemological break fostered by the structural-functionalist school against evolutionism and historic cultural reconstructions.[19] In the era of late colonialism, the apparent increment of accusations, judgments and retaliations drove scholars to inform witchcraft as a specific object of research. Interpreting accusations as signs of dysfunction, as well as tools for social cohesion, matched the functionalist paradigm to colonial domination. The subsequent transformations of witchcraft are connected to the paradigm shift in social science and to the change of perception of reality and of ethics in Western societies. The Marxist theories of witchcraft as ideological consciousness determined by archaic power structures – prone to disappearing with the advent of socialist rationality – mirrored the struggle for decolonization undertaken by the different trends in the European Left. The theories claimed to be able to explain why and how rural and factory workers (thus workers deprived of means of production and of land and thus reduced to the status of commodities) believed to subtract themselves from the inflexible dominion of the logic of capitalist production by turning to occult practices and oaths to the devil (see Taussig 1980).[20] In the Sixties and Seventies, in the former colonies that were seeing an affirmation of forms of the so-called African Socialism, the discourse on witchcraft acquired an untimely/retro allure and seemed definitely inappropriate. The ideology of modernization had played a fundamental role in condemning tribalism as a precolonial cultural relic. The demonization of tribal past expressed itself politically through both the refusal of the traditional system of power – allegedly conspiring with colonialism – and of Western anthropology.[21]

Starting from the early 1990s, we could detect a resurging interest in witchcraft,[22] which, indeed, has not just disappeared – as traditional powers have not disappeared.[23] On the contrary, in African media, one could see a swarm of accusations and rumors regarding love witchcraft, witch sport competitions and other imaginary facts, like the vanishing or shrinking of sexual organs.[24] Unfortunately, though, even mutilations, crimes and child

sacrifices were still being practiced for heinous occult goals.[25] Witchcraft has thus been theorized as a crucial element of the exotic modernity[26] of the postcolonial world and also as a power instrument for accessing the circles within which globalization[27] provides everybody, more or less illusorily, the commodities produced by the world economy.[28] The model suggested by Taussig has been thus put forward again, although without the rigidity of a Marxist schema, all showing a blurred theoretical framework to which witchcraft and globalization provide its frame in a sharp critique of the neoliberal world order.[29]

In the last decades, another emerging phenomenon is the multiplication of Pentecostal and independent churches that stress and foster spiritual care of diseases through forms of demonization of the past (see Costantini and Schirripa in this volume) and exorcism of witchcraft aiming mainly at eradicating the latter.[30] Yet many of these churches, in their daily practices, put themselves forward as legal alternatives to witchcraft by promising their followers similar beneficial effects to those supposedly deriving from occult practice.[31] Most of all, accusations and supposed witchlike phenomena are so common and happen so frequently that one has to be reminded of their frequency in the colonial era. As the Comaroffs have argued:

> Postcolonial Africa is replete with accounts of the way in which the rich and powerful use monstrous means and freakish familiars to appropriate the life force of their lesser compatriots in order to strengthen themselves or to satisfy consuming passions.
>
> (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, p. 282)

The quote seemingly about postcolonial Africa implicitly hides the history of precolonial Africa. The wealthy and the powerful have always employed monstrous means and freakish familiars in order to keep their power over subjects and subordinates, especially on the masses of domestic slaves destined for service work, for heavy agricultural or mining work, or for export in the slave trade, and to human sacrifices. What looks to be a contemporary explosion of witchcraft is attracting the attention of anthropologists because of the former's explicit links to modern needs and ideologies. Be this as it may, it is a fact that seems to undermine the historical depth of its link with the African past, with ancient beliefs, and

with slavery and the slave trade. The reuse today of archaic practices, like ritual murders, seems to put aside the historical drama of domestic slaves or war captives, once the preferred victims of the ancient human sacrifices.[32] Contemporary witchcraft would thus be a reincarnation of history that would act as a sort of redemption of slavery through the reproduction of practices typically embodied by the aristocracies until the end of nineteenth century. The goal of the Comaroff is, yet, to insert what they define as "an epidemic of mystical evil" into a renewed form of holistic anthropological analysis aiming at explaining the transformations that occurred to witchcraft in Africa together with the fantasies, fears and New Age practices in the Western world. Would this approach be a "historical anthropology of world systems that is not merely the History of the World System"? (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, p. xiii). Or, rather, a "postcolonial anthropology of the global age"? (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, p. 294). Whatever the case be, this holistic perspective sees witchcraft as a crucial political element of the modernity of backward worlds, which must be perceived as being integrated in the so-called "millennial capitalism".[33]

What legitimates the classification of magic-ritualistic murders and blood oaths with spiritual powers under the category of witchcraft? Such a classification cannot be legitimated solely by an evil intent, which, by overthrowing the rules of civil living, drives actors to committing a crime. Nor can it be by underscoring the occult manner in which those heinous deeds are committed. A legitimation cannot be achieved by referring to magical ends as such, since these do not necessarily coincide with a supposed witchcraft. Moreover, we cannot legitimate these crimes under the category of witchcraft by hinging upon an oath with spiritual powers, since this could be assigned to religious practice. It should be acknowledged that the definition of these murders as witchcraft depends on all the aforementioned features, as on their moral negative charge as a whole, and on the fact that they are inspired by greed and tend to the production of an exorbitant wealth, which is impossible to acquire simply by working. As complex events, these crimes reflect the fuzzy set of magic, sorcery and witchcraft. Moreover, they show an analogy with the apparent magic of financial practices that create money through money, providing "a metacommentary on the ill-doings of capitalism and globalization" (Moore and Sanders 2001, p. 14). In this perspective, ancient and new beliefs, as well as local practices and yelled ideas on the devil ranted by preachers in

the swarming world of independent, spiritual, Pentecostal and other churches – join forces in putting together the construction of witchcraft as metanarrative of African modernity and mirror of the Western conscience. Witchcraft thus becomes a kaleidoscope through which the emerging of new and gory phenomena is observed on a horizon that is dominated by uncontrollable and violent power relations.

Perspectives

It has been a few years now in which we have seen the multiplication of studies showing the necessity of dealing with the nature of witchy representations, and not only with the rationalistic analysis of beliefs and accusations. In this realm of studies, we can find the idea that beliefs in witchcraft are mostly connected to interior and oneiric life, along an uncertain edge between the real and the imaginary (Baum 2004; Laughlin 2011), or rather concerning with the faculties of the intellect (Hallen 2001). The analysis of witchcraft is rooted in hermeneutical forms of experiences sometimes defined as extraordinary (Goulet and Granville Miller 2007; Young and Goulet 1994), or is perceived as what is at stake in the postcolonial debate for an African philosophy (Bond and Ciekawy 2001). Some of the most recent reflections on witchcraft as an element of interiority are meaningful instances of the retreat of the Western subjectivity into the most diverse forms of the search for the self.[34]

This book wants to be an exploration into the universes of ideas, perception, violences, emotions and repressions that incorporate beliefs and practices that we define as witchlike. These always find their propeller in crucial existential events, marked by sometimes devastatingly strong feelings, such as love, hatred, envy, greed or often by harrowing sorrows, extraordinary sensitivities and deliriums of omnipotence and omniscience. To what extent these feelings, sensitivities or deliriums are able to physically affect the external world – i.e. to what extent is an individual able to modify the physical or psychic reality of other individuals – it is a matter similar to that of the reality of magic powers, and albeit the problem permeates some of the following pages, it is foreign to this book. Nonetheless, dismissing witchcraft with a summary judgment asserting its nonreality can be superficial, and it is thus necessary to show a more

respectful attitude towards the objectives of the others. Jewsiewicki's invitation to an epistemological pluralism is timely today more than ever, and his question on witchcraft is crucial: "shall the researchers share their basic postulates of local actors, or, on the contrary, shall they locate themselves outside of their experiences and of their interpretative frameworks of the world?" (2001, p. 626). Éric de Rosny (1981, 1992) seems to be situating himself in the first of the two options, whereas official anthropology seems to have chosen the second one, yet aware of the nuances pointed out by Peter Geschiere (2001, 2013). Jewsiewicki asks if it is possible to conceive of an epistemology of comparison that would allow for the shift from one framework to the other without yielding to the obligation to reduce the former to the latter. In other words "how to reconcile objectives with respect for local actors? i.e. how to relate the reciprocal objectives of practical action, ours, on one hand, the scientific one, and on the other hand, the one of local actors?" (Jewsiewicki 2001, p. 627). A healthy epistemological pluralism, as some sort of cognitive schizophrenia, should allow the researchers to work with different regimes of truth and, as an anthropological Ariadne's thread, it should lead them into the reality principle that grounds local representations and then bring them back home. This can be possible only by trying to sympathize with beliefs and supposed witchlike activities in order to understand in which ways they may be intertwined in the universe of ideas, feelings and deep emotions that characterizes any specific social context. In order to do so, it is not essential that we experiment with certain treatments or stimulatory techniques;[35] it is only necessary to practice at the highest level of ethnographic reflexivity and maintain the utmost openness to local discourses.

The basic assumption underlying this book is that witchcraft is only one version of the idea of power over the human aspirations to health and salvation, to welfare and domination. Therefore, it cannot be thought about exhaustively unless in an integrated articulation with the domains – medicine and religion – where material and spiritual powers intermingle on the ambiguous border of the physical and mental dimensions of reality.[36] Although the contributions presented in this book focus on very different objects and show quite different styles, approaches and theoretical frameworks, nonetheless they share the common goal of analyzing and discussing the articulation of the mental and social dimensions of life with the jurisdictional action of political, religious and medical institutions. The

various ways in which such an articulation takes on its historical or cultural shape throw peculiar and different lights on the relations of witchcraft with religion and medicine.

Religion and witchcraft are historically linked for sharing at various levels and in different ages a common bulk of practices and beliefs that have been explored only partially. Moreover, they overlap within the field of relations between human and nonhuman agencies.[37] Since earlier Antiquity, specialized operators have been practicing divination, oneiromancy, necromancy and even sorcery within the boundaries of religious institutions. In Africa and in many other parts of the contemporary world, witches share with other categories of agents (gods and ancestors) a nonmaterial dimension of social life that can be labeled as spiritual, although not exclusively religious.[38] Medicine and religion have often been tackled together, or at least approached with interconnected objectives.[39] The Latin words *salus* (health) and *salvus* (safe) share the etymological root of the theological concept of salvation. Relevant chapters of the anthropology and history of medicine concern, on the one hand, illnesses that are believed to originate from the spiritual realm; on the other, the spiritual treatments of any kind of sickness. As for Antiquity, in an obscure passage of his work, Hippocrates mentions "quidnam divinum" probably referring to the domain of the "sacred sicknesses" sent to humans from the gods, a domain that since then has been the object of debate, especially during the Renaissance (Lavenia 2013). The relation of healing practices with religious cults and sacrifices is a domain that ethnography has widely observed and documented throughout the world. In all societies, illnesses may originate from nonhuman agents (gods; both good and evil spirits), or even human agents (ancestors; witches or sorcerers, and so on), due to some moral fault or because of envy or hatred, and no treatment can be undertaken unless after the discovery of the spiritual cause. During precolonial times, traditional healing and witchcraft have often been superimposed or confused to the point that even today they overlap in popular discourse. In the colonial age, the European governments issued legislation in their African colonies for the repression of witch-finding as well as healing practices, unduly assimilating the two.

A second assumption underlying this book concerns the historical rationality of beliefs. The historiography and ethnography of witchcraft are paved by the scientific bias that witchcraft is a nonexistent object that may

only appear as the irrational side of the human mind.[40] Irrationality can only be explained as deviation from the rules of rationality and the principle of reality of the observer. Lucien Febvre, in a famous article of 1948, suspected that mentalities of different historical ages may not be governed by the same rules of rationality. In that same year, Ernesto De Martino published *Il mondo magico*,[41] where he claimed to restore magic to its historical place and value against the naturalistic stance of evolutionism.[42] De Martino, referring to Heidegger's existentialist paradigm of "being-within-the-world", coined the concept of "crisis of the presence", interpreting magic as the means for redeeming "presence" when physical, moral or social dangers jeopardize one's life.[43] He considers existentialist ideas as

> reflections of our historical debt, as yet unpaid, to that magic age of history in which the being-within-the-world was still an "in-fieri" human option, when the presence was something to be aimed for, a task, a drama and a problem. We are prisoners of the cultural limitation that makes us think of a limited presence as something sinful; in the magic world, however, it is precisely this limited presence that provides a salvation.
>
> (De Martino 1988, p. 148)

Magical powers are true for those who believe in them, and De Martino affirms that the reality of magic is a problem of modern man, who does not share that belief. The problem "involves not just the quality of magic powers, but also our concept of reality […] implies a radical recasting of our cultural 'Einstellung' and, above all, a widening of our concept of reality" (*Id*. pp. 3, 153), which may change in the historical process of cultural transformation. The danger of losing one's presence in the world cannot be completely warded off by scientific knowledge, nor can it be completely exorcized by religious faith, unless through some forms of scientific or religious fanaticism that is nothing but a magical faith. That danger is intrinsic to human life in every moment of existence, and humans put forth tactics and strategies with the aim of being in safety. When it happens that humans voluntarily jeopardize their own life, it depends

generally on ideological reasons that are believed to guarantee the conquest of the presence at a higher level than that of ordinary people.

In the introduction to a recent book on the history of witchcraft and magic in early modern Europe, Ankarloo and Clark argue that

> Early modern witchcraft and magic are impossible to think about in isolation from the major developments of the age – the fundamental religious upheavals of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations, the transformation of political institutions and state systems, the competition for resources and the struggle for stability in agrarian economies, the development of medical and natural philosophical knowledge and so on. Indeed, the process of interpretation may be moving in the reverse direction, with early modern European history becoming impossible to think about without witchcraft and magic.
>
> (Ankarloo and Clark 2002, p. ix)

However, mere theories of magic are of little help in the task of interpreting human agency within the nonmaterial side of reality. As I argue in the first chapter of this book (Agencies, Jurisdictions and Paradigms in the Shaping of Witchcraft), it may be useful to adopt a wider perspective. This may include a paradigm of power based on physical and spiritual means that humans need for succeeding in life. Perhaps the most important human need is that of organizing, knowing and shaping the future. To achieve this, humans need to believe in their own thinking (and dreaming) and therefore to live in a dimension of thought that may be populated by any kind of mental entity. Equally important is the need to maintain a physical excellence in terms of health, satisfaction of appetites (alimentary and sexual), strength and agreeableness of the body. From this, the fear of crisis (hunger, pain, ugliness, physical weakness or imperfection, impotence, illness and death) ensues, as well as the idea that all these disgraceful situations may be the product of nonhuman or even human malicious action. A third, but not least, element is the need to control people and things. Ruling the world, that is subduing one's own surrounding social, material and psychic environment, is the small or great task of individuals according to their social position and networks, personal skills and mental

power, and whether they succeed or succumb, their fight for life is a search for power.

The political work of the institutions is that of transforming knowledge and beliefs into public ideologies or doctrines as official frameworks for social action. Doing so, their jurisdictional activity carries on public rituals in which precise rules of what is right and wrong are performed in order to safeguard the correct reproduction of the institutional setting. The work of the individuals, as such or in groups, is that of manipulating knowledge and beliefs within the available public ideologies with the aim of succeeding in life, overcoming obstacles and adversaries, and controlling the institutions in any given historical arena. In all ages and places, winners and victims are actors in the same game; therefore, the reconstruction of the dominant paradigm of power from their discourses and actions may throw a better light on their inner life and produce a contextual historical understanding of their practices and ways of reasoning.

This volume is composed of eight chapters. The first (Agencies, Jurisdictions and Paradigms in the Shaping of Witchcraft, by Mariano Pavanello) aims to open a discussion on the processes of construction of witchcraft based on the jurisdictional action of religious and civil institutions. It also aims to contribute to the comparability of European and extra-European beliefs, to the analysis of their reciprocal articulation and determination, in the cultural encounter during the centuries of European expansion. The second chapter (Witchcraft, Medicine and British Colonial Rule. The Anthropological Analysis of Colonial Documents in the Gold Coast, by Elisa Vasconi) examines the ways in which British colonial administration defined witchcraft and built it into a category and a maleficent phenomenon. In particular, it focuses on the political and legislative colonial language, which used the terms witchcraft, occult and supernatural without distinction, leveling off different local cultural phenomena. The chapter analyzes the process of criminalization of witchcraft and the imposition of a new health policy as the expressions of the European civilizing mission and colonial governance. Moreover, an examination of the colonial vocabulary gives rise to particular reflections about current interpretations of witchcraft and the recent revival of witchcraft accusations in Africa.

The next chapters are devoted to ethnographic insights. The third (Witchcraft and Dream. A Discussion of the Akan Case, by Mariano

Pavanello), sets forth the hypothesis that witchcraft pertains to the inner life of some individuals who share peculiar levels of sensitivity and can exercise their mental life, particularly the oneiric dimension, according to specific cultural patterns. The author, basing his argument mainly on Akan ethnography and his own fieldwork among the Nzema of Ghana, challenges the mainstream view in anthropology and history that considers witchcraft as illusory and only, or mostly, connected with evil, showing that witchcraft may also have positive moral connotations. The fourth chapter (Witchcraft and Religion in the Process of Formation of the Public Space in Ghana, by Angelantonio Grossi) is an exploration into a particular aspect of the modernity of witchcraft in Ghana. Digital media are recognized to play a major and controversial role both in fueling the democratic process and creating a new space of political action. Taking into account ethnographic examples from contemporary Ghana, the author evaluates the formulation of critical concepts such as the 'public sphere' and 'civil society' by considering the limits of a Western-defined discourse. The resilience of the occult, along with its reconfiguration within the religious domain, maintains strong bonds with digital technologies, also occupying the Ghanaian public space in very visible ways. The two following chapters (Where Christianity is Ancient. Pentecostalism, Evil in the World and Break with the Past in Ethiopia, by Pino Schirripa; and "*Be Yesus Sh'm*". Breaking with the National Past in Eritrean and Ethiopian Pentecostal Churches, by Osvaldo Costantini), focus on Pentecostal Churches in Ethiopia and in the Eritrean and Ethiopian diaspora in Rome. Pino Schirripa deals with the fight of the Pentecostals against the Coptic Orthodox Church, considered to be an African traditional religion, and therefore demonized. Osvaldo Costantini discusses the problematic relationship of the Eritrean refugees in Rome (who follow the Eritrean Pentecostal Church) with their recent past, whose painful memory is a salient characteristic of their present life. The seventh chapter ("*I went out into the street … and now I fight for my life*": Street Children and Witchcraft Accusations in Bangui, Central African Republic, by Andrea Ceriana Mayneri) deals with the street children of Bangui, who are often suspected and accused of witchcraft. The streets of Bangui are peopled by 'sections' of children who have been abandoned by, or have chosen to flee from, their families. These street children include some who have been accused of witchcraft by members of their household. Accusations have sometimes been confirmed in churches or some other

places of worship in the city. Analyzing how these street children describe their condition as outcasts, the anthropologist's attention is necessarily drawn by the violent dynamics that take form in the districts of the city and in the families. The last chapter, by Roberto Beneduce, (Fields of Experience: In Between Healing and Harming. On Conversation between Dogon Healers and Sorcerers) explores the links between the spiritual power of healing and the harming power of sorcery in the Dogon Plateau (Mali). Healing and harming are the two sides of an ambiguous relation between a healer and his 'patients', a relation hiding its nature of social violence. A healer may be a witch, but also a 'patient' may be a witch, and the hidden conflict between innocence and evil contains the secret grammar of the most elementary and potentially devastating human sentiments.

Notes

1 The Nzema, a matrilineal society of the Akan group, are settled in extreme southwest coastal Ghana, between the rivers Tano to the west and Ankobra to the east. I carried out fieldwork in Ghana from 1989 to 2013 and spent 35 months in the field. Basic bibliography on the Nzema may include: Grottanelli (1977, 1978, 1988); Pavanello (1995, 1996, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2007); Schirripa (1999, 2005); Valsecchi (2011).

2 The Nzema is still, in Ghana, the biggest production area of coconuts. The territory is literally covered in plantations of *Cocos nucifera.*

3 I will refer to people mentioned in this chapter with their real names.

4 The Jomoro Mechanical Center has been implemented and sponsored by the Town Council of Peccioli (Pisa, Tuscany), where I also happen to live. Bawiah is a town along the main route connecting Ghana to Ivory Coast.

5 Usually translated into English as queenmother, *ɔbahema* describes the charge of feminine powers through all ranks of the chieftaincy, from the smallest communities in the villages to the so-called Traditional Areas, heir to the ancient precolonial chiefdoms and kingdoms.

6 The poisoning of food is the most common option. In addition, magic packages left on thresholds of the prospective receiver of sorcery houses is very common. Amulets and poisonous plants are usually put into these packages. These actions are in pidgin called *juju* (in Nzema *ayidane*, from *ayile ɛtane*, bad medicine, i.e. poison).

7 Apart from the seminal works of Comaroff and Comaroff (1999, 2002), and Kapferer (ed. 2003), see, among the most recent contributions, Jansen (2009); Lindhardt (2009); Parish (2015); West (2005).

8 Evans-Pritchard's (1937) distinction between witchcraft and sorcery remains as a remarkable standpoint in the history of ideas in that it tries for the first time to separate conceptually the magical manipulations of sorcerers with their medicines or poisons from a spiritual, negative force that can burst out from the mind or the heart and harm psychologically and physically. As is well known, this distinction proved to be very problematic in ethnography and history (see Macfarlane 1982; Mair 1969; Middleton and Winter 1963; Pool 1994). "Witchcraft and sorcery are concepts that are frequently used interchangeably, and some anthropologists (Kapferer 1997,

Turner 1964) have challenged the validity of their distinction, seeing them as different aspects of an often obsessive concern with human agency" (Kapferer 2002a, p. 10).

9 See also Moore and Sanders (2001, pp. 3 ff.).

10 The term 'witch doctor', too often used as a synonym for sorcerer in the twentieth century, is emblematic of such semantic confusion. See the debate launched by the journal *Africa* with its special issue on Witchcraft (published in 1935) and particularly the contribution of Melland (1935) and Orde Brown (1935) (see Vasconi in this book).

11 As to the relations between witchcraft and healing, see also de Rosny (1981, 1992, 2006); Geschiere (2013, p. 69–102). See also Jewsiewicki (2001, p. 631, 632) who mentions "sorcellerie/guérison" and "sorciers/guérisseurs" referring to Dozon and Augé (1995) and Geschiere (1995). For francophone West Africa, see also Kerharo and Bouquet (1950).

12 In a project assessment mission on behalf of the Italian Cooperation.

13 Italian word for witches. "Strega" is a feminine noun from Lat. *strix*, owl.

14 This category of healers is halfway between the herbalists and the so-called fetish priests who heal through spiritual possession. *Amuron* is the feminine version of *emuron*, healer (see Dyson-Hudson 1966, pp. 120 ff.). "The performers of magic are called *emuron/ngimurok* for male practitioners, and *amuron/ngamurok* for female practitioners…. [T]he term also applies to practitioners of the other activities derived from divination…. A spirit can, by striking somebody, manifest its intention of having chosen that person as an *emuron/amuron*…. The *emuron* in the exercise of his activity as a medicine-man, normally combines together his knowledge of nature and his ability as a diviner. On the other hand, the *amuron*, or female practitioner, recurs to *ngililae*, *i.e*. to the voices of the spirits, which can be heard by shaking a gourd with small pebbles inside, whose noise only she can interpret". (Novelli 1999, pp. 107, 109, 126).

15 One of the innumerable possible examples is the *evur* of the Fang of Cameroon: "Notions like evur are extremely common in traditional interaction. Almost every anthropologist has, in the course of fieldwork, come across such a term, which is extremely ambiguous, yet is placed at the very heart of traditional discourse…. Although they are of constant use in the traditions concerned, their exact meaning seems to remain obscure or inscrutable to the speakers themselves. This combination of extreme salience and apparent vacuity constitutes a challenge to the common anthropological ideas about traditional categories" (Boyer 1990, p. 26).

16 Cf. Englund and Leach (2000). In addition, it is worth remembering Augé (1976, p. 128): "A privileged, isolated phenomenon might be nothing more than a fluctuating or ephemeral aspect of a wider reality. Only a deep understanding of such a reality can rightly frame the privileged phenomenon within a correct analysis; the opposite route is impossible."

17 "[T]he tradition-modernity dichotomy, though today pervasive, is itself the product of the colonial imagination. The very category of 'tradition' is itself the ideological product of modernity" (Sanders 2003, p. 347).

18 A very general question, to which this book does not certainly dare to give an answer with new reflections, is the relationship between witchcraft and magic. The blurred and vague nature of both concepts suggests we should avoid reigniting a centuries-old discussion that seems, nowadays, ingenuous and misleading, like the distinction between white and black magic.

19 "Magic was a notion pertaining to evolutionary theory and its speculations about primitive mentality. The social anthropologists of the 1930s aimed at drawing a precise boundary with evolutionism, and the concept of witchcraft was offering that opportunity" (Bellagamba 2008, p. 80).

20 Cf. also Kapferer (1988).

21 Alternative trends to dominant paradigms in the twentieth century have been those rising from psychoanalysis (Kluckhohn 1944; Róheim 1930, 1948, 1950); from historicism and phenomenology (De Martino 1988, 2005; Gallini 1973; Favret-Saada 1977, 2009); and from analytical philosophy (Hallen 2001; Hallen and Sodipo 1997).

22 See, among others, John L. Comaroff (1996); Comaroff and Comaroff eds. (1993); Geschiere (1995, 1998, 2000); Kapferer ed. (2003); Lattas (1993); Moore and Sanders eds. (2001); Sanders (1999); Shaw (1997); West and Sanders eds. (2003). It is interesting that this multiplication also concerned French-speaking anthropology (see the monographic issues of *Politique Africaine* "Pouvoirs sorciers", 2000; and *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* "Territoires sorciers", 2008) that in the previous years had seemed not to be particularly interested in the matter, save a few almost prophetic works (Augé 1975, 1976, 1979; Mallart i Guimerà 1975), and the works of the Jesuit Éric de Rosny (1974, 1981, 1992, 1996, ed. 2006).

23 Traditional powers, in the last decades, have regained vitality, credit and political importance in almost all Sub-Saharan Africa (see Perrot and Fauvelle-Aymar eds. 2003; Rouveroy van Nieuwaal and Ray eds. 1996; Rouveroy van Nieuwaal and Van Dijk eds. 1999; Vaughan 2005). Nowadays traditional powers and witchcraft are seen as strong elements of African contemporaneity. See also Chabal and Daloz (1999).

24 See, for example, Mandel (2008); Masquelier (2008). See also Henry and Tall (2008); Sanders (2003). "Recourse to occult powers is widespread in many African countries, particularly in national competitive arenas such as sport and school, and in the more exclusive political sphere" (Royer 2002, p. 465).

25 Bernault and Tonda (2000, p. 5), in their introduction to the issue of *Politique Africaine* devoted to witchcraft powers ("Pouvoirs sorciers", n. 79, October 2000) open their considerations with the following statements: "Rumors of diabolical murders; politicians accused of using secret societies and 'medicines' for securing success; urban obsessive fears of kidnapping for ritual dismembering of children and young women; domestic and neighborhood conflicts based on witchcraft accusations; there are no conversations, no radio transmissions or popular press issues, which do not echo the collective fears and covetousness linked to magic, witchcraft and daily violence of occult forces. Thus, witchcraft in Africa did not disappear, contrarily to the hypotheses of the Sixties and Seventies predicting the decline of superstitions face to the advancing of economic development, education, urban life, and monotheistic religions. Indeed, witchcraft is presently assuming the role of an unavoidable category of the public and private life". See also J. Comaroff (1997).

26 Apart from the major works on the modernity of witchcraft (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Geschiere 1997; Sanders 1999), we may quote Kapferer's statements that "sorcery is a major space of invention" (2002b, p. 107) and witchcraft beliefs and practices are manifestations of "the new", and sites of religious innovation (*Id*. 2002a, 2003). The theorization of witchcraft as a crucial element of African modernity has been the object of critique by Englund and Leach (2000) and Rutherford (1999). Here is Geschiere's reply: "Creating a relation between witchcraft and modernity is not an academic whim. Such a conceptual link may help in understanding how the witchcraft imaginary imbues and conditions the way in which people try to explain modern changes" (Geschiere 2000, p. 26). It is not possible to deepen here the debate on modernity and its multiple stands; see the special issue "Alternative Modernity" of *Public Culture* (vol. 11, n. 1, 1999) and Tambiah in "Multiple Modernities", *Daedalus* special issue (vol. 129, n. 1, 2000).

27 The same observation by Meyer and Geschiere (1999, p. 1) on globalization can be made of witchcraft, i.e. that it "amounts to nothing more than a sensitizing notion, rather than an analytical concept".

28 Cf. Comaroff and Comaroff eds. (1993); Fisiy and Geschiere (1991). For a recent contribution on Melanesian cargo cults and their relations with dreams, see Lattas (2010). A good deal of anthropological literature had already discussed the issue of the negative influence of Western capitalism and development on local cultures, especially for the spreading of witchcraft accusations and antiwitchcraft cults or movements (see Fields 1985; McLeod 1975; Willis 1970).

29 See Bernault and Tonda (2000); Ciekawy and Geschiere (1998); Dozon and Augé (1995); Geschiere, Meyer and Pels (2008); Mbembe (2001); Meyer (1999a); Meyer and Geschiere eds.

(1999); Meyer and Pels eds. (2003). The media, pop literature and, most of all, TV and cinema fictions produced in the Sub-Saharan countries provide many examples of behavioral patterns influenced by the contemporary witchy representations. For the video-production industry in the Sub-Saharan region see, as an example, Krings and Okome eds. (2013).

30 See, for instance, Henry (2008); Meyer (1992, 1995, 1999a)

31 Comaroff and Comaroff (1999, p. 291): "The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God … is rumored to issue charmed credit cards that register no debit and promises instant goods and gratification to those who embrace Christ and denounce Satan…. Here, Pentecostalism meets neoliberal enterprise: the chapel is, literally, a storefront in a shopping precinct". According to Meyer (1999b, p. 161) "Pentecostalist preachers claim to be able to penetrate the invisible and to bring about physical healing and improvement of material conditions by fighting a spiritual battle against demons".

32 This crucial issue would deserve a much deeper analysis than the hint that it is possible to give here. The ambiguous notion of 'human sacrifice' sways from the idea of 'capital punishment' (Wilks 1975, 1988; Williams 1988) to that of ritual murder for propitiatory or religious purposes (cf. Terray 1994; McCaskie 1995, pp. 17, 213) or 'fetish' practices (cf. Pietz 1995). For an accurate analysis of this argument, and the link between slavery and human sacrifice in a correct historical perspective, see Law (1985); Lovejoy (2000). For a work on the correlation between witchcraft and the history of slavery and the slave trade, cf. Austen (1993).

33 "The epidemic of witchcraft and the killing of those suspected of magical evil, moral panics about the piracy of body parts; all are, alike, symptoms of an occult economy waxing behind the civil surfaces of the 'new' South Africa. Drawing on cultural elements with long indigenous histories, this economy is itself an integral feature of millennial capitalism" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, p. 283); see also Comaroff and Comaroff (2000, 2002).

34 Peter Geschiere's last work (2013), in many respects, can be ascribed to the same complex contemporary perspective.

35 See Castaneda (1973) or Taussig (1986).

36 A crucial area in which medicine, religion and witchcraft overlap is the field of therapies carried out through spiritual possession or by forms of trance, as in shamanistic practices and in many African possession cults, which have often been compared with witchcraft phenomena (see Behringer 1998; Klaniczay 2001, 2006; Whitehead and Wright eds. 2004). This peculiar relation between medicine, religion and witchcraft is reflected in some Afro-American cults, like Brazilian Candomblé, Cuban Santeria and Haitian Voodoo, which originated from the encounter of African beliefs with the desperate need of recreating a familiar social context in the hostile environment of the New World. Healing practices and beliefs in occult powers favored the overlapping of all three categories in a single phenomenon that Western observers classified for a long time as *feitiçaria*, *brujeria*, *fétichisme* (witchcraft or fetish-cult), or at least as shamanism (see, among others, Bastide 1967, 1978; Brandon 1997; Falola and Childs eds. 2004; Geschiere 2013, pp. 135–164; Mann and Bay eds. 2001; Métraux 1972; Souza 2003).

37 For example, see Ellis and ter Haar (1998). For a study of the contemporary neopaganism, see Greenwood (2000).

38 We should be very cautious in the use of the Western categories of religion and witchcraft in their interplay because it may confer on our reasoning a dangerous ambiguity. In the analysis of nonWestern or noncontemporary mentalities, what to us appears as a distinction between religious and nonreligious may be quite misleading. Actually, the separation of the two domains depends heavily on the jurisdictional action of the religious and political institutions; therefore, it is fundamentally an issue related to the historical reasons governing the work of the institutions rather than a mere problem of epistemological complexity.

39 See, for example, Levack ed. (1992, 2001); Sullivan ed. (1989) and the recent collective book edited by Donato *et al*. (2013).

40 The history of the early modern European witch-hunts offered historians a very wide area of investigation on what has been considered as a collective panic and an irrational social craze; see the critical essay of Midelfort (2011).

41 "The magical world"; see the English translation (De Martino 1988).

42 De Martino's argument against "naturalism" and particularly against Lévy-Bruhl (1923) and his theory of "primitive mentality" was first set forth in *Naturalismo e storicismo* (1941). In the same year was published *Il pensiero dei primitivi* of the philosopher Remo Cantoni (1941) who aimed at explaining Lévy-Bruhl on a rationalistic perspective out of evolutionistic implications.

43 "The magic force, [*with*] the mastery of spirits, the casting of spells and imitation, is an institution that expresses the existential drama of the 'being-here' that is exposed to the danger of not being here but is recovered from this risk." (*Id.*, p. 105). See also De Martino (1977, 2005), where his conceptual model finds its most mature application.

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1 Agencies, jurisdictions and paradigms in the shaping of witchcraft

Mariano Pavanello

A paradigm of power in West Africa

João de Barros, author of the sixteenth-century chronicle *Asia*, reports that when Diogo Cão came back from the Congo in 1486,[1] the king of Benin addressed a request to the king of Portugal, João II, asking for "sacerdotes pera o doctrinarem em Fé".[2] Although we know that Portuguese missionaries had been active on the Guinea Coast since the early explorations,[3] sources do not report any reply from the Portuguese king, and we do not know whether the king of Benin was eventually catechized and baptized. It is surprising that the Portuguese, who, since the same year 1486, had been fully developing their relations with the Courts of the Congo and immediately satisfying their desire to convert to Christianity,[4] were, on the contrary, refraining from involving themselves with the king of Benin, whose kingdom was closer to the coast of Mina (the Gold Coast). It appears that doubts were raised about the reason for his request, and the chronicler suspects that the man had a keen desire to overwhelm his antagonists on the coast.[5] Were the Portuguese aware that conversion to Christianity might have an ulterior motive, and that the king of Benin was perhaps looking for a supernatural support stronger than that offered by his traditional deities? Were they combining political reasons with religious scruples in keeping that king on the edge of Christianity in order to protect their commercial allies on the coast of Mina? Anyhow, the Portuguese were

aware that Christian faith was seen by the natives as a means of establishing an alliance with the Europeans, and as an instrument – reputed to be much stronger than their traditional cults – to achieve or consolidate political power. Should we suspect that the Portuguese were to some extent sharing the same ideology professed by their African interlocutors, i.e. an ideology that makes people convinced that success, either individual or collective, like military advance and destruction of adversaries, is a sign of celestial favor or even of predestination depending upon the will of superior nonhuman entities? The same ideology makes it possible to manipulate this superior will through some spiritual force, either possessed by some human agents or granted by more powerful entities.

In order to outline the ideology that Africans were most probably sharing with their European counterparts in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, despite striking differences in cultural and religious traditions, let's analyze the biographies of two key figures of West African history: Sunjata Keïta,[6] the legendary founder of the empire of Mali (first half of the thirteenth century),[7] and Osei Tutu,[8] the founder of the Asante empire who lived four centuries later (seventeenth-eighteenth century).[9] From these two biographies we can distill a paradigm of power in which the hero protagonist is a predestined man to whom military and political supremacy is granted because of his superior spiritual power and miraculous physical excellence. The life-cycle of both heroes has four phases: childhood, exile, victorious return, and glorious reign. Despite the distance in time and space, and the difference in the form in which the two stories have been transmitted (epic song the first, historical tales the second), the biographical pattern is almost identical, showing the persistence of an ideological complex characterizing West Africa.

Nehemia Levtzion summarizes Sunjata's biography as follows:

> At the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Malinke were subjugated by Sumanguru, the powerful king of Soso. The Malinke war of independence was led by the great hero Sunjata […]. The epic of Sunjata forms a pivot in the historical traditions of the Malinke. He was born crippled and his mother suffered much humiliation from her rival-wife, whose son Dankaran-Tuma grew into a handsome and able boy. When Nare-Maghan died, his son Dankaran-

> Tuma succeeded him. Then, by a miracle and with the help of the chief blacksmith, Sunjata stood up on his once-feeble legs, and became a great hunter and warrior.
>
> (Levtzion 1973, p. 58)

The oral epic sings that Sunjata was the sickly and crippled son of Sogolon, the ugly "buffalo woman before whom powerless sorcerers shrank in fear",[10] wife of the handsome Maghan Konaté, king of Niani. When this latter died, the woman was exiled with her children because a conspiracy brought to the throne Dankaran-Tuma, a physically perfect son of another wife of the dead king, instead of Sunjata, whom the prophecy of the hunters[11] had announced as the future emperor. The hero then wandered through various Malinke Courts where the chiefs did not give him hospitality, fearing the vengeance of Dankaran-Tuma. Therefore, Sunjata abandoned the Malinke country and sought refuge at the court of the king of Mema, Musa Tunkara, in the Soninke country. There, Sunjata – who had miraculously recovered from his sickness and physical disability – was welcomed and became a strong warrior and captain of the army. During that time, the Malinke fell under the tyranny of Sumanguru, who defeated and killed Dankaran-Tuma. Ambassadors were then sent to look for Sunjata and call him back to rescue his people. Sunjata left Mema with a huge military force provided by the king, made up of infantry and cavalry. In a series of battles against the army of Sumanguru, Sunjata, with the help of his griot,[12] Bala Fasseké, triumphed over his enemies. The final battle was fought at Krina beside the river Niger, south of Beledugu. The epic song describes this battle as the confrontation of two powerful magicians, Sumanguru and Sunjata. The latter got the final victory by injecting Sumanguru's body with a white cock's nail, a poison that the victim himself had prepared for his sorceries and that Sunjata had miraculously stolen. Later on, Sunjata defeated Sumanguru's allies and conquered the whole wide land where the tree of *so* grows.[13] All the Malinke chiefs, at the end of the war, gathered at Kangaba and swore allegiance to Sunjata.[14]

Osei Tutu was the uterine nephew and heir[15] of the chief of Kwaman (later Kumasi), Obi Yeboa. As with many other partly historical and partly legendary figures, the glory of Osei Tutu was foretold by a miraculous event concerning his birth. An oral tradition has it that Obi Yeboa appealed

to a powerful and very famous shrine[16] called Otutu in the land of the Akuapem, "which was then under the powerful Akwamu state" (on the coast, close to the mouth of the river Volta), to obtain a boon that his one uterine niece, the barren Manuh Kotosii, could beget a child. Manuh then gave birth to Osei, and the child was named Tutu after the shrine.[17] Osei Tutu grew up, and when he reached the proper age was sent as a pawn to the Court of Denkyira – to which Kumasi was tributary – where the boy learned many important military techniques. Later, he was obliged to escape to Akwamu, the traditional enemy of Denkyira, because of adultery committed with Akobena Bensua, a sister of the Denkyirahene[18] and wife of a high dignitary. "When it was discovered that the Denkyira princess was pregnant, he took refuge in Akwamu where Ansa Sasraku, the Akwamuhene, became his friend because of Osei's personal beauty."[19] Oral traditions describe Osei Tutu as a very handsome boy, and Agyeman Prempeh writes that the Akwamuhene, Ansa Sasraku, fell in love with him and took Osei Tutu as his "manly wife".[20] In the Akwamu Court, the friendship between Osei Tutu and Kwame Frimpon Anɔkyie, known as *Ɔkɔmfo* Anɔkye,[21] also began. The two became inseparable when the former was called back to Kumase on his uncle's death.[22] Osei Tutu improved his military knowledge and skills in Akwamu, and the hero left with a powerful army provided by the Akwamuhene. Protected by the spiritual power of *Ɔkɔmfo* Anɔkye, the Asante prince adopted a military organization that he had learned at Denkyira. Among the miraculous actions performed by *Ɔkɔmfo* Anɔkye, oral sources mention some sorcery that favored the military victories of Osei Tutu, who eventually defeated and subjugated Denkyira, and the descent from the sky of the Golden Stool, the symbol of the Asante nation.

Similarities between the two biographies are surprising and are not limited to the narrative structure but include other more substantial aspects, like the presence of a deuteragonist beside the hero protagonist. In the Manding epic, the King Maghan Konaté had offered his son Sunjata the service of the magician-griot Bala Fasseké,[23] "who was also well versed in sorcery".[24] Osei Tutu had by his side a prophet-magician, on whom oral traditions confer the character of a cultural hero, a sort of a double of his king, thus creating a dyad founder of the state, its laws and customs.[25]

These deuteragonists have an exceptional importance in the biographies of the kings, which were entrusted to their care. Bala Fasseké protected Sunjata, helped him to defeat the magic power of Sumanguru, inspired his actions and transmitted them to the future for eternal memory. “Oh, son of Sogolon, I am the word and you are the deed, now your destiny begins”;[26] with these words the griot greeted Sunjata when they met again after the exile and before the final battle. In the Asante history, *Ɔkɔmfo* Anɔkyie, through his spiritual power, was the true creator of Osei Tutu’s might, and, like the Malian griot, was also responsible for most of the construction of his biography.

Three crucial interconnected elements give these stories their genuine significance: first, the utmost importance given by humans to physical excellence (a perfect state of health, and the attractive appearance of the body); second, the faith in superior nonhuman entities who can interfere in human events, and can change the lives and destinies of people; third, the belief in a spiritual power and knowledge possessed by some humans that can interact with the nonhuman entities for the control of people and things. Sunjata was born crippled, and the spiritual power of a chief blacksmith gifted him with a perfect physical state. Osei Tutu was an extraordinarily handsome man. Both heroes grew up as skillful warriors. Their births were announced by extraordinary events: Sunjata was prophesized by the hunters and was the son of a woman who was feared by the sorcerers. Osei Tutu’s mother, the barren Manuh, became pregnant after the intervention of a powerful shrine. Both army leaders had by their side a companion gifted with superior knowledge and the power of sorcery. Sunjata, who was himself a sorcerer,[27] had his griot who shared the same power with his master. Osei Tutu, who was not gifted with the power of sorcery, had his *Ɔkɔmfo*, who was a powerful witch. The spiritual power (=witchcraft) with which the companions of the two heroes were gifted was used against their rivals, who were ruinously defeated and lost their lives. The structural balance within and between the two couples and the structural correspondence between the two stories are the clue for grasping the paradigmatic value of the two historical figures. Both heroes, Sunjata and Osei Tutu, represent the power over people and things that can be achieved only through the combination of three qualities: a superior physical state, superior knowledge and spiritual power, the favor of superior nonhuman entities.

The glorification of power in sixteenth-century Europe

An ideology of power similar to that we can distill from these stories was certainly shared by the ruling classes in Western Europe. Since the time of the conquest of Ceuta (1415) and the explorations launched by Prince Henry the Navigator (b. 1394 – d. 1460), the Portuguese had celebrated the physical superiority, boldness and skill of their leaders and sailors, combining these features with the political support and the supernatural favor of the Papal authority.[28] The ships they sent to explore the African coasts in the fifteenth century had religious personnel on board.[29] Vivid examples of how success in political and military action was perceived in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are the panegyric of the Portuguese King Manuel *o venturoso*,[30] written in Latin in the first years of the sixteenth century by the Italian man of letters Poggio Bracciolini Jr.,[31] and the poem *Os Lusíadas* (The Lusiads) by Luís Vaz de Camões, published in 1572.

The *Elogium* of Poggio Bracciolini Jr. is evidence of the reciprocal interest connecting Portugal with the most important cities in Italy on the eve of the sixteenth century. The beginning of the relations between Portugal and the Italian cities may be placed in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century. After the opening up of the Genoese, Pisan and Venetian merchant routes towards England and Flanders, the Portuguese kings granted fiscal privileges to the Italian fleets that chose the Lusitanian ports for their trade stops. In the second half of the fifteenth century, these relations became stronger and closer.[32] Italian sailors were even serving under the Portuguese Crown,[33] and Italian merchant companies populated Lisbon[34] with the aim of participating in the Portuguese Atlantic enterprise. The relations between Portugal and Italy were also very strong in literature and arts, witnessing a circulation of ideas alongside the network of economic exchanges.

The Lusiads of Camões saw the light in a period when the Portuguese expansion was at its peak, and its economic power started declining. The work did not receive the attention it deserved and that it obtained later, being eventually acknowledged as the Portuguese national poem. Written

on the model of the epic poems, like the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, it is coeval with Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem* and witnesses the intellectual climate that characterized the Renaissance in Southern Europe. This poem celebrates the glorious deeds of Vasco da Gama in his voyage to India, raising the Portuguese heroes to the status of the gods of Olympus.

The two texts have much in common, despite the distance in time and space and the radical differences in style and purpose. Both start with a reference to the gods of classical Antiquity, which appears as an intellectual tribute to the cultural foundations of European civilization. Reference to Greek and Roman mythology in Medieval and Renaissance literary works, and religious treatises as well, was not the sign of heathen or esoteric beliefs but a necessary tribute to the classical literatures, with particular reference to Virgil's *Aeneid*, and for that reason, writers could not be suspected of paganism or heresy.[35] Nonetheless, we must point out that resorting to classical topics and mythology was a rhetorical expedient for masking magical beliefs under an accepted literary format. Although the Church, from the first, condemned magic and witchcraft beliefs and practices, they were a widespread feature of the social life of both popular and elite milieus.[36]

The *Elogium* praises the king of Portugal for his successful ventures across the oceans, and presents him as a model of the Christian prince.[37] The text begins with the reference to the deeds accomplished in the Orient by such deities as Osiris, Bacchus,[38] Hercules and others that cannot be compared with those of King Manuel, whom the Florentine prelate implicitly raises to a higher level than the pagan gods. Camões follows the same pattern, raising the Lusitanians to a status higher than the classical heroes as the gods Neptune and Mars will obey them.[39] In its Homeric poetics *Os Lusíadas* compares the deeds of the Portuguese with those of the great peoples of Antiquity, showing how the noble progeny of Lusos was predestined with the favor of the Omnipotent, metaphorically transfigured in the preChristian Olympic gods,[40] to achieve power over sea and land to the farthest limits of the world.[41] At the end of the poem, on the marvelous Island of Venus, where Vasco da Gama and his heroes eventually land and are welcomed by the goddess, Camões says that the fear once expressed by Bacchus that the Portuguese would become gods has been confirmed.

What perhaps is more important to focus on is the perfect identity of the ideology of power expressed in the two texts, which is a significant part of the shared ideas throughout all Christian Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. First, we must consider the strong symbolic value of the excellent body shape and the connected physical strength which accompanies all descriptions of the classical deities and with which the heroes (King Manuel in the *Elogium*; Vasco da Gama and his men in Camões) are credited as far as they are compared to, or even raised to a higher level than, the gods of Antiquity. The Christian heroes are superior men who work for God and whom God favors.[42] The second aspect is the miraculous character of their enterprise. In the *Elogium*, the deeds of Manuel were foretold by the Prophets. In *Os Lusíadas*, the glorious Portuguese fate in the seas and in the Orient is recalled by Jupiter in the council of the gods.[43] The third aspect is that victory over one's enemies may only be granted by the favor of God, which is connected to the religious faith of the heroes. This idea is explicitly stated in the *Elogium*[44] and implicit in the whole poem of the Lusiads, especially in the numerous treacherous situations in which the Portuguese heroes were hindered or about to be defeated and eventually ended triumphant.

The same paradigm of power appears at the basis of African and European ideologies that justify, and even sanctify with a supernatural chrism, the superior status of those groups who are in top positions (royal dynasties, aristocracies, political and military elites, and so on). To this scope, the historical reasons of the human actions are always reconstructed afterwards according to the current paradigm. All the three crucial interconnected elements that we distilled from the stories of Sunjata and Osei Tutu in medieval and early modern West Africa are also present in the intellectual atmosphere of sixteenth-century Europe: the importance given to physical excellence (the idea of the immortal and ever young body of the classical deities on which the human state of the heroes is projected); the faith in superior nonhuman entities who can interfere in human events, and can change the lives and destinies of people (Jupiter and the other deities that help the heroes representing Divine Providence; Bacchus hindering the enterprise of the Lusiads representing to some extent the role of the devil); the belief in a spiritual power and knowledge possessed by some humans who can interact with the action of the nonhuman entities for the control of

people and things (the religious faith possessed and professed by the heroes that, according to the words of the gospel, can "move mountains").

Witchcraft as a paradigm of evil power

Both paradigms of power examined in the previous paragraphs are embedded in systems of beliefs that can be acknowledged as religious. In the West African horizon of thought, human and nonhuman powers overlap, and positive magic interplays with occult sorcery, the two realms fading into one another to a point that it is not possible to draw a neat borderline between good and evil. In the European worldview, by contrast, real power is attributed only to the nonhuman sphere, and good and evil are seen as clearly demarcated. In the Christian horizon, indeed, that misty sphere of beliefs in ambiguous occult powers and practices, generally labeled as witchcraft and/or sorcery, lies to the opposite of the celestial power and is considered as pertaining to the realm of evil. This ideological configuration has marked European history since late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages in a process of very long duration that created and recreated the public and political dimension of witchcraft within a moral opposition between good and evil.[45] Curiously enough, the jurisdictional action of the states and particularly of the Church, and the reformed churches as well, was hinged on a general belief in magic and witchcraft that is reflected in their juridical, philosophical and theological writings,[46] while the "moralizing terminology"[47] of the contemporary political, religious and intellectual milieus is grounded on disbelief. We shall return to this issue later.

The historical process that shaped the ideological configuration of witchcraft deserves careful analysis, but here, of course, it will be possible to draw only a preliminary outline. We may roughly consider two main historical phases, the first starting with the spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire and ending in the second half of the eighteenth century, the second from the Enlightenment to the present. The bases of the canon law concerning the principles and practice of witchcraft, as well as the ways of fighting evil, were laid down by the Church mainly from the fourth to the seventeenth century. The Lutheran Reform split Christendom and multiplied the institutional religious subjects that were engaged in the struggle against evil, but also confused Christians, producing antagonism

among the communities of different confessions, in a much more complex situation than that created by the medieval heresies in the previous centuries. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, the Counter-Reformation of the Catholic Church and the Protestant civil authorities, under pressure of the reformed churches, were competing in the fight against witchcraft. Nonetheless, in this last period, different opinions about witchcraft arose, and skepticism and disbelief, whose seeds had been germinating for a long time,[48] spread throughout Europe.[49]

The eighteenth century was a transitional period. In 1735, the English Parliament repealed the 1604 Witchcraft Act of James I.[50] The last execution of a convicted witch, Anna Göldi, occurred as late as 1782 in Switzerland in the Protestant town of Glarus. The prosecution of witchcraft in civil and ecclesiastic tribunals in Europe had declined by the first decades of the eighteenth century, though legislation was little modified apart from in areas under Napoleonic domination.

> The Tribunals of the Roman Inquisition all over Italy came to an end in the last third of the eighteenth century, first under the influence of enlightened ideas common among the Habsburg and Italian princes, but then even more radically at the hands of the troops of revolutionary France. With the restoration of the *ancien régime* in Italy in 1814, the old guardians of the faith were not resuscitated, with one important exception: in the Papal States, the cardinals of the Holy Office resumed meeting weekly.
>
> (Decker 2008, p. 203)

The second phase is a completely different history. On the one hand, the growing implication of the European powers in the direct control of overseas territories, once areas of their commercial expansion, obliged the ruling classes to face – particularly in the African colonies – the problem of witchcraft as a serious problem of governance. On the other, historical and ethnographic research, especially in the twentieth century, produced objective knowledge about witchcraft beliefs in somewhat exotic societies, distant in time (early modern Europe) and space (overseas territories). Such knowledge – the multifarious result of quite different intellectual paradigms – is available only to highly educated categories of people and firmly

fastened on the scientific bias of the nonexistence of witchcraft. However, as Geschiere argues,

> The anthropology of sorcery and witchcraft was profoundly influenced by a series of monographs, especially by British authors, from the end of the 1950s. Despite important differences, these authors had the same basic perspective. All studied witchcraft/sorcery as a conservative force within local arenas, focusing on witchcraft accusations that were supposed to serve to maintain the status quo and defend the local order against the undermining impact of new, external influences. It is striking that, among these classical anthropologists and later among many of their followers, a highly moralizing view of the occult forces prevailed. Most anthropologists still tend to reduce discourses on witchcraft to an unequivocal opposition between good and evil, even when the local terminology hardly lends itself to this.
>
> (Geschiere 1997, pp. 12, 13)

The jurisdictional action of colonial governments, the evangelization carried out by different Christian missions and the scientific paradigms of anthropology and historiography have contributed enormously to consolidating a moralizing and negative attitude towards witchcraft that is shared at all social levels.[51] Geschiere's critique of the anthropology of witchcraft can be applied to most historical works, as well. Moreover, contemporary scholarly research on early modern European witchcraft disdained to approach the topic with a cross-cultural perspective, with the exception of some British historians.[52] Therefore, much work is still to be done on comparing European history with extra-European ethnography. I want to stress that such a comparison cannot be limited to the cross-cultural analysis of beliefs and practices pertaining to different worlds. It needs to explore the reciprocal articulation and determination of European and extra-European agencies that shaped the cultural encounter during the centuries of commercial expansion that were also the age of the witch-hunts and the Atlantic slave trade. Without such a historical perspective, witchcraft might be reduced to fulfilling the function of a looking-glass reflecting the dark

side of the observers' world according to the dominant paradigm; thus a real understanding of its historical reasons would escape us.

Historians and anthropologists have been working side by side since the beginning of the twentieth century, but their reciprocal knowledge has been insufficiently synchronized.[53] Anthropologists, on their side, have done very little toward filling the gap. Some attempts have been carried out, like the seminar organized by Mary Douglas in 1968,[54] but during the long season of British structural-functionalism, anthropology was not ready to grasp what Geschiere refers to as those "broader configurations", like the jurisdictional role of national and supranational institutions that have the power of determining significant changes in mentalities and practices. "A difference between historians and anthropologists was that the former were much quicker in realizing how local witchcraft events – for instance the large-scale witch-hunts in early modern Europe – were directly affected by changes in the role of outside agencies like the state or the church".[55] The topic of the jurisdictional action of religious and civil institutions in the shaping of witchcraft in Europe is widely dealt with in contemporary historiography. The corresponding issue of the determinant influence of colonial and postcolonial governmentalities and the spiritual control of religious institutions on the transformations of witchcraft in the contemporary world has been approached only recently in anthropology. What is still lacking, however, is a historical investigation on the jurisdictional action of the Church in the areas of missionary expansion from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, as well as an exhaustive analysis of how anthropological theoretical paradigms have contributed to shaping the idea of witchcraft since the beginning of the twentieth century.

As a matter of fact, during the Middle Ages and the early modern period, the object "witchcraft" was progressively molded by the continuous interplay of the jurisdictional action of ecclesiastic hierarchies and popular beliefs and practices. Despite local and historical differences in the various Western European cultural contexts and striking diversities in social classes, the same *Weltanschauung* was shared throughout Christian Europe. Clergy and laymen, intellectuals and commoners, urban dwellers and rural folk, shared a paradigm of power that was extremely close to the one examined in the previous paragraphs and was based on the ontological principle of the lack of a precise border between the mental and the material dimensions of life. Moreover, the body of classical knowledge was a necessary and

important complement of the intellectual formation of both clergy and aristocratic laymen. It functioned as an accepted, complementary world vision and as a corpus of natural science or philosophy, provided that pagan elements were expurgated or metaphorically used as a substitution for Christian characters. Particularly in the field of medicine, the classical works of Hippocrates and Galen in their Latin versions had dominated the intellectual scene since the early Middle Ages, along with the popular knowledge of the crowds of herbalists and magical healers.[56] This could not happen without a certain degree of conflict with the more conservative wings of the Church, whose representatives – like St. Bernard of Clairvaux – sharply criticized the use of pagan knowledge or, even worse, the practice of superstitions, to the detriment of the faith.[57] The physical state of health, like the spiritual state of grace, was a gift of God that Christians had to preserve. Sickness and premature death could be interpreted as the result of sins. Natural treatments with herbs and other remedies were considered practically ineffective unless accompanied by God's will. The Church provided Christians with the powerful instruments of sacraments and prayers, and therefore there was no need for other spiritual means. Medical practice and therapies, however, were at the borderline between natural and spiritual-magical knowledge, but the Church tolerated them. What Christian doctrine could not accept was the conception of magic as an autonomous body of knowledge and powers independent of God and the Church. In this case, magic was considered as the work of the devil. In a totally different perspective, the use of magic, and the complex world of occult knowledge and practices (necromancy, oneiromancy, astrology, divination, witchcraft, sorcery, with their apparatus of charms, spells, herbs, ointments and, last but not least, presumed inner spiritual powers) could very well meet popular needs, as well as intellectual claims.

Although ideologies ferment at the level of the upper classes and are shared to various degrees by the lower classes, there is a continuous interchange between the different social levels, sustained by the circulation of discourses among individuals and above all by the jurisdictional action of the institutions. Theories of the world receive their chrism of truth, becoming doctrines, when they are elaborated in canonical form by the ruling elites for jurisdictional purposes, establishing orthodoxy and heresies. In fact, alongside the officially accepted ideas, variants of dominant theories may be shared by commoners, and sometimes may even

be elaborated and reshaped in sophisticated forms of counterdoctrines, or heresies. In such cases, we can recognize the role of counterelites who work in order to satisfy social needs or aspirations of the emerging classes. Witchcraft and magic in the history of Christianity, far from being marginal features of the societies that had embraced the new religion, filled the gap left by the old cults and periodically played the role of countertheories, sometimes in combination but more often in conflict with the dominant doctrine and its heretical variants.

After its rise as the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, Christianity became the ruling ideology as opposed to the remnants of paganism. The ancient beliefs in magic and sorcery were reelaborated to fit the new ideology of power. This was the work of the bishop and doctor St. Augustine (b. 354 – d. 430). His demonology reconstructed in terms of Christian theology the pagan beliefs and magic practices that still survived in the regions of the Roman Empire before its fall.[58] A process of continuous reconstruction can be observed throughout the Middle Age in the struggle of Christian hierarchies against the survival of classical and German pagan cults that were transformed into diabolical beliefs or heresies.[59] Popular beliefs and ideologies alternative to Christian doctrine may be extracted mainly from the writings of orthodox intellectuals, such as canonists or theologians, though we cannot be sure that they reflect exactly the views, beliefs and practices that were the object of the struggle carried out by the Church. Sources or testimonies of the cultural and social environments in Western Europe in the centuries between the fall of the Roman Empire and the eve of the second millennium are scarce.[60] More light is thrown after the tenth century, when popular heretical movements started spreading in correspondence with the development of cities and free communities, the rise of the middle classes, and the flourishing of urban sectors of specialized artisans.[61] One of the intellectual consequences was the overlapping of heresy and magic, particularly in the form of witchcraft beliefs, which became more and more frequent in ecclesiastical hierarchies,[62] to the point that it appeared as accepted common sense in the centuries of the witch-hunt,[63] when an increasing number of people accused of witchcraft were convicted and executed.[64] According to the *Sacro Arsenale*, the first handbook on inquisitorial procedures published in the Italian language by the famous seventeenth-century Italian inquisitor Fr.

Eliseo Masini, five categories of people were subject to the Inquisition: (1) heretics; (2) their supporters; (3) witches, magicians and so on; (4) blasphemers; (5) people who act against the Holy Office. Witches, magicians and so on are all those who explicitly or implicitly have made a pact with the devil for themselves or on behalf of others.[65]

The canonical doctrine

From the *Canon Episcopi* of Regino of Prüm of the tenth century to Burchard of Worms' *Decretum* of the early eleventh century; from Master Gratian's *Decretum* to John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* of the twelfth century; from the theological works of St. Thomas Aquinas of the thirteenth century to the *Directorium inquisitorum* of Nicolaus Eymerich of the fourteenth century and the *Formicarius* of Johannes Nider of the fifteenth century, we can describe the jurisdictional action of the Church as drawing on popular beliefs in the form given by the custodians of orthodoxy to define heresy, profane magic and witchcraft in a single framework.[66]

The first element of the official doctrine is the demonization of magic, of which witchcraft is a constitutive part. The treatise *Libri duo de synodalibus causis et disciplinis ecclesiasticis*, written by Regino of Prüm in the year 906 and known as the *Canon Episcopi*, laid down the basis of the canonical doctrine of the Church for the following centuries, its articles and prescriptions being confirmed in the later treatises until almost the sixteenth century. It summarizes the point of view of the Church, clenching the Augustinian argument of the demonic origin of the arts of *sortilegium* (divination) and *maleficium* (sorcery), thus associating under the category of heresy the beliefs in the power to help or harm that some people claimed to possess and ascribing its origin to the devil alone.[67]

The second most important element is the rather fuzzy demarcation between the physical and spiritual dimensions of life that characterized the accepted principle of reality. The lack of a precise border between the mental and the material realm is also witnessed by the general belief that material reality can be modified by the will of God, the intercession of saints, or the derivative power of angels and devils, or more simply by the mental power and occult instruments of magicians and witches. A widely shared belief was that dreams might be as real as the waking state and that a

continuous relation linked the world of the living with that of the dead and the spirits. This kind of "dream culture"[68] is still widespread throughout the world[69] and even celebrated in famous contemporary stage plays.[70]

Regino distinguishes two types of wicked people, mainly women: those who claim to have the power to modify the order of things through charms or *maleficia*, and those who claim to participate in nocturnal flights riding upon animals and following the devil disguised as the ancient goddess Diana.[71] Regino argues that experiences of this kind, which many people believed to be physically real, were actually induced by the devil in dreams, especially in poor and silly women (*mulierculae*).[72] Witchcraft events happen in the spiritual dimension, but witches, and many other people as well, believe they pertain to the material realm: "The mind of the infidel thinks that these events happen materially and not only spiritually. Who could be so stupid as to believe that what happens only in the mind is also happening in the body?"[73] Such a statement might make one suspect that Regino is denying the current principle of reality based on an indeterminate demarcation of the physical and mental dimensions. On the contrary, he is emphasizing the opposition between the inner experience of witchcraft and material life, with the explicit goal of condemning the former as demonic and therefore deceitful spiritual vision. The evil moral relevance he attributes to such an inner experience (dream, hallucination) is a clear evidence of his principle of reality.

The same ideas are expressed in the twelfth century in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* (1154):

> The evil spirit, with God's permission, inflicts the excesses of his malice on certain people in such a way that they suffer in the spirit things which they erroneously believe they experience in the flesh. It is in this sense that they claim a *noctiluca* or Herodia, or a witch-ruler of the night convokes nocturnal assemblies at which they feast and riot and carry out other rites, where some are punished and others rewarded according to their merits. Moreover, infants are set out for lamias and appear to be cut up into pieces, eaten, and gluttonously stuffed into the witches' stomachs. Then, through the mercy of the witch-ruler, they are returned to their cradles.

(Kors and Peters eds. 2001, pp. 77–78)

It is noteworthy that this author ascribes this type of believed experiences to hallucinations induced by the devil and argues that such beliefs can only be professed by simpleminded men (*quidam rustici*, *rudes*) who could be easily deceived by the devil. The canonical tradition, therefore, does not deny the reality of witchcraft; on the contrary, it affirms that it is a spiritual one, within an ideology professing a sort of ontological *continuum* between the mental and the material spheres. Witchcraft experiences are demonic illusions, but they have a moral impact on the witch who abandons him/herself to heresy, apostasy and other horrible sins, which the devil lets him/her feel to be physically real. These actions can also have physical consequences on other people who may be affected by the malevolent operations of the witch through the power of the devil. This is the foundation of the presumed power possessed by the witch and the juridical ground for its prosecution.

The explicit theological foundation of the canon law about these phenomena was that God permitted the devil to interfere with human life (*Domino permittente*) by tempting Christians and trying to capture their souls. The demonic work was thought to happen especially in dream where true or false things or persons can appear as the objects not of the bodily senses – which may be untrustworthy – but of the mind, and therefore dreams may be true or false revelations. The truth and falsehood of dreams must be considered as moral and not gnosiological qualities:

> [Quid signum et de sompno]. Signum siquidem est, quod seipsum sensui, et praeter se aliquid animo ostendit. Quaedam tamen signa sunt, quae nulli corporalium sensuum aliquid ostendunt, sed animo cuiuscumque rei specie mediante aut citra medii difficultatem verum falsumque frequenter ingerunt. Signa etenim interdum vera, interdum falsa sunt. Quis nescit somniorum varias esse significationes? ([What sign is and about sleep]. A sign is what shows in itself a thing to the body senses; out of itself it may show something to the mind. There are signs that do not show anything to the body senses, but put before the mind the truth or the falsehood of any species of things. Therefore there

> are some true and some false signs. Who does not know that the meanings of dreams are variously interpreted?)
>
> (John of Salisbury [1154] 1909, Lib. II, cap. 14, p. 87)

Some centuries later, in 1437, the Dominican friar Johannes Nider confirms in his *Formicarius* the same doctrine about the truth and falsehood of dreams and about the night-flights of witches, which were regarded as hallucinations induced by demons, often with the use of drugs, ointments and magical spells. He reports an interesting episode of a Dominican Father who dealt with a certain stubborn woman in a village who claimed to fly in the night with Diana and other women. The woman was invited to sleep in the presence of witnesses, which she did after applying an ointment and uttering magical words. During her sleep, the woman was shouting and tossing so much as to hurt herself falling to the ground and wake up. The priest then asked her where she had gone, arguing that she could not have gone anywhere since the men who were witnessing could confirm that she was only sleeping and dreaming.[74]

The canonists established a comparison between demonic illusions and the mystical visions and dreams described in the Old and New Testaments, discussing two problems: first, the status of the truth or falsity of the visions; second, the borderline between the physical and the spiritual dimensions of reality. If it is not possible to challenge the supernatural reality of the spiritual visions of Jacob, St. Joseph, St. Paul or other saints, though they sometimes involved bodily reality as well,[75] similarly, the visions induced by the devil may be true, unless they can be explained merely as natural nightmares or hallucinations. How to distinguish dreams genuinely inspired by the devil from natural nightmares was a disputable issue; however, the official doctrine admitted the reality of visions that could not be explained by natural causes, at the same time confirming that the borderline between the physical and the spiritual (mental) dimensions of life is thin or nonexistent. The biblical visions are no doubt examples of contact with God. Diabolical visions convey morally false images and ideas that persuade the dreamer of their reality. Although whatever the devil shows in dream is false, he urges people to commit in spirit heresy, apostasy and evil actions. Therefore, dreams may be true means of contact between humans and the devil, involving the free will of individuals, being morally

significant and becoming the legal object of prosecution and trial from the ecclesiastic authorities.

The various categories of magic- or evil-doers, like fortune-tellers (*sortilegi*), sorcerers (*maleficii*), and witches (*lamiae*, *striges* or *strigae*), were generally dealt with under the same label, because very often, when a man or a woman was accused of some sort of *maleficium*, it was discovered that he/she could be charged with a variety of other sins and crimes in the wider field of "demonic arts". However, during the early Middle Ages, magical arts, like healing, divination, love-magic, cursing, dream interpretation and so forth, though sharply condemned, were seldom prosecuted unless these practices gave way to serious conflicts or physical and moral damage. The intensification of ecclesiastic attention towards such activities in the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was undoubtedly due to the spread of heretical doctrines. In the twelfth century, the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire "agreed to a common policy to combat the enemies of the faith".[76] By the mid-thirteenth century, inquisitors appointed by the pope or the bishops, or by the generals of the new orders (Dominicans and Franciscans) were "increasingly employed".[77] As Kors and Peters argue, in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, "the transformation of the ideas of diabolical sorcery and heresy into witchcraft" appeared as a matter of fact, and the theory that witches were a sect organized by the devil with the aim of destroying Christianity was established in its final shape.[78]The Lutheran Reformation brought the idea that the Catholic Church with its rituals, sacraments and indulgences was a sink of witches,[79] whereas, on the Catholic side, the identification of witchcraft with heresy was institutionalized: in 1542, with the bull *Licet ab initio*, pope Paul III founded the Holy Office, the central Roman Inquisition, with the task of prosecuting heretics and witches.

Witchcraft: Dream or reality?

The late fifteenth century represented a turning point in the development of doctrine as well as of popular variants of the ideology of power. The "infamous bull of Pope Innocent VIII *Summis desiderantes affectibus* of 1484"[80] marked a new impulse in the persecution of witches. A few years

later, the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum*[81] in 1487 and the wide circulation of its printed editions contributed to the development of an unprecedented witch craze, and "the upsurge of witch trials in the early 1490s in central Europe has been interpreted as a direct result of its publication".[82]

The *Malleus Maleficarum* deserves particular analysis. It is a vast treatise on witchcraft conceived of as a particular form of heresy. It was used during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a doctrinal inventory by Catholic inquisitors, but it also strongly influenced the conduct of the Protestant authorities.[83] We can find in the *Malleus* an interesting development of the official theory: "all this [*assumption by the devils of a material shape whether human or animal body; displacement of bodies from one place to any other and so on, including night-flights and Sabbaths*], the devils, with God's permission, can do of their own nature, for the spiritual nature is superior to the bodily. Therefore the bodily nature must obey the devils".[84] This represents an adjustment of the doctrine expressed from the *Canon Episcopi* to the *Formicarius*, in that it admits that witchcraft actions and misdeeds have both a spiritual and material nature, the latter being the product of the superior demonic (spiritual) power. Sabbaths are therefore illusions created by the devils but with the material involvement of the witches' bodies as well. The border between the spiritual and the material orders of life was thus developed in a more sophisticated way than in earlier treatises, with a special interest in elaborating a philosophical ground to the growing belief in the material reality of witchcraft and explaining the amazing confessions obtained under torture by the inquisitors. Convicted witches confessed to night-flights to sordid Sabbaths with their familiars (spirits in forms of animals) and many other people; sacrilegious crimes of blasphemy, heresy and apostasy; evil actions of deviant sexual and cannibalistic orgies, such as copulating with devils – *incubi* or *succubi*; homosexual[85] and incestuous intercourse; crimes against life and property such as killing unbaptized and even baptized infants; eating corpses; destroying cattle, and so on.[86] The actual value of these confessions is highly doubtful, all the more so as in England, where torture was against common law and had no place in witchcraft trials, confessions did not concern night-flights, Sabbaths and other horrible crimes. "English witches did not fly, did not go to Sabbath, did not copulate or make pacts with the

devil […]. They kept 'familiars' – homely, though diabolical, pets. They were accused not of being heretics, but of harming their neighbors' cows. They were not tortured or burned".[87]

Were confessions in continental Europe only due to torture? Probably not. Many people accused of witchcraft are reported to confess spontaneously. We should consider depression syndromes, mental disturbances or keen desires urging some people to confess what they would like to do or to be, or simply what happens in their dreams.[88] Furthermore, we should also consider that – apart from carnival that was a ritual period of tolerated disorder, actually a ritual of reversal – [89] real practices of nocturnal debauchery, whether connected or not with heretical movements or antiecclesiastic attitudes, were concretely performed. Life in the peasant world had an orderly flow in accordance with the agricultural cycle. In Christian Europe, agrarian and liturgical cycles overlapped, and so work and feast-days were organized according to the Christian calendar. Public festivals were rigidly controlled by the ecclesiastic and civil authorities, and private feasts were under strict social control. Nonetheless, dance gatherings often took place at night as the expression of social distress or relaxation outside the control of the Church and the communities.[90] Such phenomena, which are witnessed from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries, sometimes took the form of true choreomania.[91] The Catholic bishops and inquisitors and the Protestant civil and ecclesiastic authorities actively prosecuted these collective phenomena because they could easily appear as diabolical meetings. Religious scruples or personal interests most probably urged zealous Christians to denounce women and men attending such gatherings. Eventual confessions, often extorted under torture, allowed tribunals to label all these social phenomena under the heading of witchcraft. Oneiric illusions, often caused by the use of drugs, and physical participation in licentious entertainments, illegal sexual activities or simply dance gatherings thus merged both in popular ideas and practices and in the inquisition's interpretation of them.[92]

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the number of witches burnt or hanged in various parts of Europe started increasing. Obviously, sentences of the material destruction of the witches' bodies needed material evidence. Franciscans tried in vain to prevail against their ancient rivals, the Dominicans, with the opinion that night-flight and Sabbath existed only in

the fantasy of excited and silly women,[93] but the idea that the witch Sabbath was a real event was thus gaining ground. As a matter of fact, the *Malleus Maleficarum* worked as a powerful ideological tool against deviant behaviors, especially of women, both in Catholic and Reformed areas.[94]

Witch-hunts burst out all over Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and thousands of convicted witches were executed on the Continent and in the British Isles. The historical and social reasons for this "horrible tragedy, dishonoring both humanity and Christendom"[95] are analyzed in a wide corpus of scientific literature, and the issue cannot be dealt with here. What needs to be explored is the general tendency in both Catholic and Protestant Europe to exaggerate belief in the socially harmful material aspects of witchcraft, and to promulgate new regulations or reinforce the existing ones to oppose occult practices.[96] The perception that the enemies of the Christian faith were also enemies of society was gaining consensus, especially with the spread of the Reformed confessions when Catholic people were considered enemies of the Protestant communities and vice versa. New demonological treatises were produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, according to the various Christian confessions, emphasizing the reality of the realm of witchcraft and the need to fight evil and punish its followers.[97]

> The sudden increase in witch panics from 1560s saw new demonologies emerging from all religious camps. This reflected the need to reshape the old teachings of the *Witches' Hammer* for Protestant purposes. […] Zwingli's successor, Heinrich Bullinger (b. 1504 – d. 1575), felt it was time to confirm, in what was to be the first Reformed publication on the matter, the consensus on demonology as based upon the gospel, without referring openly to scholastic theology or the *Malleus* (*Von Hexen*, Zürich, 1571). A year later, Calvin's successor in Geneva, Lambert Daneau (b. 1530 – d. 1596), followed Bullinger's example.
>
> (Behringer 2007, p. 412)

Scholarly research agrees that at the end of the fifteenth century "the fundamental distinction between the fantasy of night-flight and its reality disappears. The diverse worlds of diviners and magical healers are

uniformly included in a single condemnation, to the extent that every kind of magic reveals a member of the devil's sect".[98] The British historian Trevor-Roper argues that "The belief in witches in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not, as the prophets of progress might suppose, a lingering ancient superstition, only waiting to dissolve".[99] Analysis of sources confirms that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the idea of a demonic conspiracy against Christendom was spreading and that witches were probably members of sects actively operating in the conspiracy, thus corroborating the perception of witchcraft as a countertheory in opposition to Christian doctrine.[100] Moreover, a new and more sophisticated view of the nature of witchcraft actions and the borderline between the physical and spiritual dimensions of reality was actually coming into being. However, in my opinion the thesis of the radical transformation of the canonical principle of the spiritual reality of the night-flight and Sabbath cannot be completely accepted.

During the peak period of the witch-hunts, the border between the mental and the physical dimensions of life was still problematic, and the material reality of the Sabbath was not yet precisely defined. The Spanish Inquisition, in 1525, raised doubts "about whether male and female witches travel there [*to the Sabbath*] in person and do the things to which they confess".[101] A controversial case at the end of sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century was that of the *benandanti*,[102] witnessing the transformation of an innocuous popular complex of beliefs and practices into a standardized form of witchcraft. In certain villages of northeastern Italy (Friuli), the inquisitors found people who called themselves *benandanti* and who claimed that they were "good" wizards able to cure the victims of the witches' evil deeds. All the *benandanti* had this trait in common: they were "born with a caul", that is, enveloped in the amniotic sac (thought of as having magic powers). They claimed that their main task was that of fighting against sorcerers (*stregoni*); the *benandanti* met in secret, at night, four times a year according to the seasons, reaching their meeting place riding on hares, cats or other animals. Their assemblies were not like the witches' Sabbath because they lacked all the well-known diabolic features that were confessed in the witch trials. The *benandanti*, provided with fennel branches, were only fighting the sorcerers (*strighe* and *stregoni*), who were armed with broomsticks. If they were victorious in the

combats, then the crops of the year would be abundant; if not, there would be scarcity and famine.

> The *benandanti* claimed that they went *in spirito* while they slept. Before the 'voyage', they fell into a state of great prostration, an almost cataleptic lethargy, during which their soul was able to leave the body. They did not use any ointments to prepare their voyage, which, though accomplished *in spirito*, was, for them, real".[103]

It was not possible to produce evidence of the physical reality of such voyages, and no one was sentenced to death, but some of these *benandanti*, in 1581, were convicted and imprisoned for heresy.

Decker reports interesting documents issued in the sixteenth century by the *Suprema* (the highest Spanish Inquisition Council) in which it is asserted that "No one should be arrested or condemned only on the basis of denunciations by other witches" and that inquisitors "should not believe everything in the *Malleus Maleficarum*", arguing that "the greatest caution needed to be employed to verify whether people who participated in the Sabbath did so in reality or whether they remained in their beds".[104] As late as 1610, the Spanish inquisitor Don Alonso de Salazar Frias issued a verdict in which he declared: "According to what scholars say of these phenomena, it is demonstrable that the witches go to the Sabbaths many times in dream [*spiritual y mentalmente*], even though perhaps at other times they participate bodily".[105] A good deal of theological and canonical debates took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and there was no full consensus on whether witches were physically participating in such meetings. A conference of theologians summoned in Bologna on May 7, 1559, discussed the probative value of the witches' Sabbath, and although "none of the experts denied the possibility of the witches' dance and its evidentiary value in court", the physical reality of the Sabbath remained unclear.[106]

Skepticism was rather gaining consensus in the second half of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries[107] to the point that the Roman Inquisition issued in 1593–1603 an *Instructio pro formandis processibus in causis Strigum sortilegiorum et maleficiorum*,[108] witnessing a more cautious attitude. The same Salazar Frias was appointed to carry out

an enquiry on a "witch panic in the Spanish Basque territories" performing "such a thorough analysis that it reads like a piece of sociological research, and the outcome was that all accusations were judged fabrications and that therefore all imprisoned suspects should be released at once".[109]

Johann Georg Gödelmann (b. 1559 – d. 1611), jurist at the University of Rostock, developed an

> efficient argument that made it very difficult to justify torture or capital punishment in cases of witchcraft. He avoided demonological issues completely and focused on the legal issues, denying the acceptance of denunciations as circumstantial evidence in court, and calling for material proof or eye-witness accounts which, of course could hardly ever be provided.[110]

The inquisitor Eliseo Masini, in his manual of 1621, reaffirmed the doctrine that when witches are participating in their Sabbaths (either spiritually or physically), they are under the influence of the devil who can make them see false things; therefore, when a witch witnesses against another witch with whom he/she was participating in a "diabolic tragedy", this witness cannot be accepted because witches are deceived by the devil and believe they see what does not exist.[111] The difference in the perception of reality between a good Christian and a witch is then assumed as a criterion for the inquisitorial procedure. But there is no doubt that it is also evidence that the physical reality of witchcraft actions in the seventeenth century was still uncertain and disputable and that a differential perception of physical and mental dimension of reality was gaining ground.

Beliefs in the material reality of witchcraft, and particularly of the Sabbath, came to an end,[112] at least in educated milieus, in the eighteenth century. Recent historical analyses are summarized by Edward Bever:

> Traditionally, historians have concentrated more on the rise in witchcraft fears, and the prosecutions that they engendered, than on their decline. The reason for this imbalance is that whereas the triumph of illusory beliefs seemed problematical, the reason for their defeat seemed self-evident: influenced by the rational and scientific thought of

> the Enlightenment, educated Europeans simply came to their senses. More recently, however, social historians have noted that the trials stopped well before the Enlightenment had come to dominate even educated opinion, and pointed instead to such changes in social life as growing prosperity, various forms of insurance, technological development, and the triumph of individualism to explain the defusing of the tensions that they argued had generated accusations and sustained prosecutions. However, since most of these changes occurred well after the prosecutions died down, and popular suspicions continued to be expressed long after the socioeconomic developments that purportedly lessened the tensions generating them took place, the social-historical explanation has been found wanting, too. Historians of witchcraft now reverse the traditional assumption and see the decline of witch beliefs as – at least in Western and Central Europe – an important cause, not an effect, of the change in elite mentalities. Furthermore, changes in both popular practice and unconscious behavior during the very period of the witch-hunts contributed to the decline of elite concerns about witchcraft. The actual consequences of the witch prosecutions and the elite's simultaneous "crisis of confidence" about them were vital components in a more general "crisis of authority" during the mid-seventeenth century and the larger decline of magic during the latter half of the early modern period.
>
> (Bever 2009, pp. 264–265)

The two last witch trials celebrated in Switzerland in 1779–82 show that official attitudes of ecclesiastic authorities, both Catholic and Protestant, were influenced by Enlightenment ideas, and a certain degree of conflict was arising between high clergy and local ruling groups, who still shared the ancient folk beliefs. The next-to-last trial against Maria Ursula Padrutt (1779–80) in the Catholic village of Tinzen (Grisons) was still formally a witch trial, whereas the last one against Anna Göldi (1781–82) in the protestant town of Glarus was officially a trial for attempted murder by poison.

> In 1779, the unmarried Maria Ursula Padrutt attracted suspicion that she was a witch. The old chaplain of the village had been sick for a long time, and when his bed was being made, fragments of animal hoof were discovered: the elements of black magic, malefícium, as it was thought. A visitor to the priest found three cats in his kitchen. He went after them with his saber, but they escaped outside, and one climbed onto the roof. There, supposedly, was Padrutt – or, at least, he "believed that he saw her up there". The turning point occurred during carnival in 1779. When several young men from the neighboring village went on a rampage in front of Maria Ursula's house, she shouted at the rowdies, calling them by name: "Go home or you'll be sorry!" That was all the proof necessary. Only a witch could have known the names of the strangers and utter such a curse. […] The court decided to have Maria Ursula Padrutt arrested and began a witchcraft trial.
>
> (Decker 2008, pp. 195–196)

The local judges sent the case of the suspected witch to the bishop of Chur, who suggested handing over the woman to the Inquisition tribunal of Bergamo in the Republic of Venice.[113] The inquisitor, "a Dominican friar named Carolo Domenico Bandiera, investigated the case and determined that Maria Ursula Padrutt was innocent [… …] and sent her home with these words: '*Dite ai vostri patrioti che sono tanti coglioni e pazzi'* ".[114] This case shows

> how varied the understanding of witchcraft was within the Catholic Church. It was not popes and ecclesiastical inquisitors of the early modern period who displayed a fanatic zeal for persecutions, but large portions of the simple people, the lower clergy, and the secular judges. The democratically organized, rural Swiss village communities were more backward in their way of thinking than centrally controlled, territorially extensive states with their enlightened elites. But the inquisitor of Bergamo, who could only shake his head over the ignorance of the people of the Grisons, was a representative not of the secular Enlightenment but, rather, of the Roman Church, which in Italy

> (and in Spain), despite a dogmatic acceptance of witchcraft as a crime, carefully distinguished between sorcery as actually practiced and witchcraft that was only a fantasy. Such subtle distinctions, however, were hard to convey to rural people, and in this, Protestants and Catholics stood on common ground.
>
> (*Id*., p. 197)

Anna Göldi was accused of attempting to murder the nine-year-old Anna Maria Tschudi, daughter of the medical doctor Johann Jakob Tschudi, in whose house Anna was a serving woman.

> The deed was supposedly performed in September 1781, when Anna gave the child a cookie. By November, Anna Maria had become severely ill, a condition that lasted almost eighteen weeks. She suffered cramps and voided (mostly vomited)[115] sharp objects (needles, nails, and iron wire), until suddenly, in the presence of witnesses and on the orders of the court, Anna (who in the meantime had been arrested) healed her by using her "extraordinary and incomprehensible arts and powers". The accusation and verdict avoided using such terms as "magic" and "witch", but the description of Anna Göldi's actions leave no doubt that, in the judges' minds, only black magic could have caused Anna Maria's illness, and only white magic could have healed it. To support this view, they appealed to the judgment of a respected physician from Glarus, Johann Marti, who after some initial skepticism admitted: "I … found no other way of explaining this without supposing magic, which is still possible". On June 24, Anna Göldi was decapitated "as a poisoner", and her corpse was buried under the gallows. […] In the Glarus verdict, however, there was no explicit mention of "witchcraft", because the accusers probably reckoned with the critique of the enlightened.
>
> (*Id*., pp. 197–198)

In the case of Anna Göldi, the ecclesiastical authority of the Reformed capital city, Zurich, tried to determine a different result but, unlike the case

of Maria Ursula Padrutt, the fanaticism and zeal of the local court prevailed.

Popular beliefs: Superstitions or countertheories?

John of Salisbury's reference to certain nocturnal rites where punishments were inflicted and awards were bestowed may suggest that believers in these ideas were people who thought they had suffered serious losses and injustice, and were seeking compensation, even though only in the form of a nocturnal vision or spiritual solace that they were probably unable to find in official religious practices. Seven centuries later, the French historian Jules Michelet emphasized that witchcraft in medieval and early modern Europe was the manifestation of the social hatred smoldering in poor and destitute people, especially peasants, toward the religion of the rich masters and mistresses against whom the miserable peasant women were urged to invoke the help of the devil.[116] "Records of witchcraft trials do not tell us only about witchcraft", but, as Kors and Peters write, too often the stories of witchcraft are stories of "children of misery".[117] It may not be necessary to resort to a class theory for the interpretation of such beliefs, because court records of witchcraft and heresy trials show that people accused and convicted belonged to all social categories, though the majority of those convicted and executed were low and poor people who could not hope to receive any particularly merciful treatment. The ideological craze that hit Europe during the centuries of the early modern age was actually a struggle for power in which a huge number of miserable people were involved while sharing more or less lucidly the available variants of the dominant countertheories. Fractions of European societies, including rich and poor, illiterate and intellectual people, laymen and clergy, were looking for spiritual instruments other than those offered by the Church (or the churches) that could enable them in their struggle for power, or merely for survival.

The Church, representing God on Earth, was engaged in the fight against the devil, who was always trying to subvert the law of God and conquer the souls of Christians. Therefore, anybody who used magic arts or participated in witchcraft actions, whether or not formally abjuring the Christian faith, but simply refusing or disregarding the spiritual tools offered by the Church, could not do it but with the help of the devil. Notwithstanding this

canonical position, many people, and among them "an astonishingly high number of clergy",[118] were practicing all sorts of magic art and sorcery. John XXII was one of the Avignon popes from 1316 to 1334, and, as Decker writes:

> was more consumed with the problem of magic than any other medieval pope. His concern was part of the general mood of his time, for in the early fourteenth century, both England and France were also troubled by reports of spectacular crimes committed through the use of magic.[119] The pontificate of John XXII was overshadowed by a conspiracy against the pope in which the participants tried to use both poison and magic.
>
> (*Id*., p. 23)

The machination for murdering Pope John with poison and waxen images was mounted by the bishop of Cahors, Géraud, who had been accused of simony before the pope. Just a few years earlier, Europe was shaken by the famous trial against the Templars accused of witchcraft by the king of France, and anxiety about occult powers and conspiracies was at its peak.[120] Three centuries later, in 1635, Pope Urban VIII was the target of another conspiracy against his life carried out by a group of eight ecclesiastics headed by the Franciscan friar Cherubino de Serafini of Ancona "who attempted to assassinate the pope by means of magic and devilish arts […] intending through spells and magic to kill him, using the means of a wax figure made in his image".[121]

During the Middle Ages, science and magic came together in many fields of intellectual practices. One of these – as we already noted – was medicine, an art and practice that Moulinier-Brogi defines as "monastic". Actually, monasteries were centers of documentation, teaching and practicing. Relations between medicine and religion, however, were never easy. From the late twelfth century, the ancient "cloister medicine" was overtaken by the practice of many members of the mendicant orders who "combined their medical knowledge with astrological competences, appreciating a discipline – medical astrology – that the Church had always considered suspect". However, these friars were forbidden to practice medicine outside their friaries, and, particularly, they were forbidden to treat women.[122] Astrology,

medicine, botany and pharmacology thus constituted a corpus of scientific-religious knowledge very close to the notion of magic as well as to the accepted notion of witchcraft. Curing illnesses and divining the future were the good face of a power whose bad face was sorcery. In 1586, a Franciscan friar, Antonio Bellinelli, was accused of "necromancy (invocation of demons), theft of holy oil from the cathedral of Pozzuoli, and possession of suspicious objects […] he confessed that he had a familiar spirit who was at his personal service. […] [H]e invoked a star, holding in his hand a wax figure of a person wrapped in a *carta vergine* (the amniotic sac of a fetus) and sacrificing a rooster to the demon". The man was executed a year later in Campo de' Fiori in Rome.[123] In 1630, the Benedictine Orazio Morandi, abbot of Santa Prassede,[124] was arrested by order of pope Urban VIII because he "had set up a center for astrology within his monastery […] and commissioned the horoscope of the pope himself [*which*] concluded that the pope would die in that year".[125]

The idea of the conspiracy against Christendom was produced by acute ideological anxiety; nonetheless, it was not groundless. Witchcraft, with its related beliefs in magic as a set of knowledge and tools independent of the spiritual power of the Church, was perceived as the emerging peak of an underground world radically antagonist to Christianity and therefore allied to the devil. The origins and significance of this patchwork of beliefs and practices can be investigated in the remnants of archaic forms of religion or folk customs.[126] Emma Wilby, echoing Carlo Ginzburg's *Ecstasies*, affirms:

> Scholars have long recognized that when elite thinkers constructed the core stereotype of the witches' Sabbath (as it emerged, in various guises, in demonological manuals from the fifteenth century onward), they drew, in part, upon folkloric beliefs that had filtered into the elite sphere via both general cultural dissemination and the witch trials themselves. […] [A] thesis seems to be accepted by most scholars: that from as early as the twelfth century many churchmen and demonologists fused folkloric ideas about beneficent nocturnal spirit hosts with folkloric beliefs about maleficent spirits and spirit hordes.
>
> (Wilby 2013, p. 18)

However, such an exercise cannot be of much interest unless it might help us reach a deeper understanding of beliefs and sentiments rooted in the popular consciousness for many centuries. What conferred persistence on these ideas? It is beyond argument that the witchcraft complex was elaborated by ecclesiastic and civil jurisdictions as a countertheory mobilizing the nonmaterial dimension of reality outside and probably against the official doctrines and institutions. It is also beyond argument that the various popular beliefs, far from being a coherent system, were nonetheless providing people with: (a) instruments of self-defense and attack for overcoming difficulties, obstacles and troubles; retorting or retaliating to ill-treatment; defeating adversaries and enemies; and causing harm to those hated when the official spiritual and juridical means proved ineffective or could not be used, and (b) means of evading the boredom of daily life and satisfying sexual appetites, perhaps often only in dreams, visions or hallucinations that could be induced by the use of drugs – though many people have an extraordinary oneiric life without using herbs or ointments. Using drugs and alcohol was also part of nocturnal debaucheries in the outskirts of the rural villages and small towns. Moreover, knowledge of how to extract stimulants or poisons from herbs was widespread, and many people (monks and laymen, as well as ordinary women and men) were able to prepare and use them in love-magic or sorceries.

On the other side, the accusation of witchcraft was the accepted means of protecting oneself from evil or envious people or smiting people for whom one felt envy or hatred. All the accusations in the records refer to material misdeeds imputed to witches either through a spiritual or a physical action. An envious neighbor who poisoned some animals was a recurrent accusation, and there was little doubt about the physical reality of such an action. Midwives, who were necessary auxiliaries during deliveries, were suspected of being witches as well. A midwife accused of killing unbaptized babies was a very common topic in the trial records, and it was quite frequent for midwives to perform abortions or attend deliveries where the babies were born dead or died immediately after. Disappointed mothers, or envious colleagues, could accuse them of infanticide through witchcraft. Midwives and wise women used also to cure illnesses through charms and prayers.[127] The same techniques were used to treat animals in case of murrain when the blessing of the official priest proved ineffective. It is quite understandable, therefore, that people who were able to perform such

rituals could be suspected as witches. The power of bewitching (sending diseases, misfortunes or even death through nocturnal activities or simply by their gaze) was the most feared characteristic of suspected witches. However, the custom of resorting to sorcerers, necromancers, diviners, astrologers and so on, in order to solve the innumerable problems of daily life, or to harm neighbors, antagonists, slanderers and even one's own close relatives, was actually widespread. On the other hand, people were continuously resorting to healers whose knowledge and power were highly appreciated. Health was a crucial problem during those centuries, not only because of the frequent epidemics but especially given the short life expectancy and high infant mortality. Falling sick meant approaching death, and too often that perception came true. "The inefficacy of the official therapies was a serious problem in the Christian world [*giving room to the belief in preternatural illnesses*], and during the modern age was the most important reason to believe in the existence of sorcery: if the treatment proved ineffective, people could think that the sickness derived from God, or more probably from the devil […] preternatural illnesses did exist and could be treated only with the help of God."[128]

If divine help was missing, unavailing, or people did not trust it, healers, witches and sorcerers were at hand.[129] What really distinguished healers from witches?[130] For sure, only the sentiments and the intimate convictions of the people who feared they might be threatened or looked for help, together with their personal relations with the suspected witch or the respected healer.

Therefore, I assume that the canonical doctrine on witchcraft – shaped in the form of a dreadful demonology – was the public metaphor of what was perceived as a dominant countertheory and was the means of providing Christendom with a strong and consistent defense against evil. It was constructed on the basis of Augustinian demonology, transmitted through the centuries and further elaborated as an inquisitional set of rules in the Catholic countries, while in the Protestant areas it was transformed into a sort of criminal code administered by the civil justice. Accusations and confessions followed rigidly the canonical scheme: formal pact with the devil; worship of the devil and sexual intercourse with him; night-flights riding on animals or broomsticks and participation in nocturnal Sabbaths performing evil sexual acts and consuming repugnant cannibal meals; killing of people, especially unbaptized babies, and eating their flesh;

seriously damaging properties and killing animals, and so on. In short, what was represented in those tales was the world upside down, in a definitely much darker picture than it appears in the works on European folklore,[131] or in the descriptions of carnivalesque rituals of reversal.[132] Too often, in the trial records, people accused of witchcraft were felt as living in a world that was the reverse of that of their judges.[133] Gobbling down stinking human flesh instead of enjoying fresh animal meat; killing relatives and babies, even one's own babies, instead of caring for and loving them; flying in the night instead of walking in the day; having homosexual or incestuous intercourse, or copulating with the devil, kissing him on the anus, instead of conducting a normal sexual life with one's own consort, kissing him/her on the lips: all that is nothing but the reverse of the normal Christian life. The ritual disorder provided by carnival was a sort of ironic, domesticated copy of the picture that emerged from the demonological treatises and the witchcraft confessions. The "rituals of reversal" were interpreted by social anthropology as a tolerated "anti-structure" social rhetoric. In this perspective, witchcraft would be the real "anti-structure", while carnival and other rituals and feasts would be its ritualized projections into the social order. It is not possible here to focus on the scientific debate on rituals and their relations with power and history[134] or their links with witchcraft, but it is necessary to make a few remarks. Abrahams and Bauman argue that

> by the late 1970s, studies of carnival began to turn away from the idea of a functional role for anti-structure, in a functional synthesis of ritual process and structural necessity, towards "a greater tolerance for disorder" and a search for an "adequate account of expressions of disorder and license as persistent elements in culture".
>
> (Abrahams and Bauman 1978, pp. 207, 196)

This position contrasts the closed and static circle of structure and anti-structure, and opens a more historical perspective, which can include the dialectical relation of state and Church power with the whole range of nonconformable practices. The translation of the works of Mikhail Bakhtin in the early 1980s[135] had the effect of introducing new elements in the debate. Kelly and Kaplan affirm:

> To Bakhtin the medieval carnival is neither a moment of anti-structure in a dialectical process of structure-making nor a place of nonstructure. It is the limit and opponent of "official" structure, its moving line of corrosive parody the counter to official power and proof of the futility of ruling efforts to hegemonize. In Turner's theories, the human nature contained the chaotic as the left hand complement to the classificatory nets of quotidian routinized spheres of action. […] Others then show that ritual is also a potent force for change, not merely a conservative power.[136] In Turner's hands drama and process encompass both order and change; in Comaroff's view,[137] the drama is the struggle to control the sign, and ritual is historical practice, a highly encoded resistance to hegemonic order. We think these elements can be brought together […]. Rituals then are not productions from cultural templates or "expressions" of structure, but instead are acts of power in the fashioning of structures.
>
> (Kelly and Kaplan 1990, pp. 119, 140)[138]

Can we make a further step forward and consider rituals as one of the products of the jurisdictional action of power institutions in a dialectical relation with the agencies of corporate groups struggling for power? In this same perspective, Karlström argues that

> Bakhtin explored elements of what he calls the 'folk culture' of medieval and renaissance Europe, such as bawdy humour and the carnival tradition, that, in his analysis, inverted and subverted the values of the 'official' culture of church and state, disclosing the popular critical consciousness and utopianism of the age […]. Mbembe concludes that Bakhtin was mistaken about the oppositional character of folk culture and that these are really elements of the discursive apparatus of state power itself.
>
> (Karlström 2003, pp. 61–62)

Unlike Mbembe (2001, pp. 102 ff.), I would suggest that folk culture lies in that ritual space of constant negotiation among the various corporate forces

struggling for control of the jurisdictional power. In fact, the Church constructed witchcraft as a countertheory aimed at unhinging the orderly world based on Christian doctrine – and therefore to be tenaciously persecuted – with the scope not of counterbalancing the "oppositional character of folk culture" but, on the contrary, of fighting her enemies by using that oppositional character and allowing it be ironically reflected in tolerated rituals. Thus, witchcraft became a real element of "the discursive apparatus" of Church and "State power itself".[139]

A bridge across the Atlantic

Willem Bosman's description of a traditional festival in the town of Axim, in the Ante or Antese (*Ahanta*) area in West Africa, offers an extremely significant picture of how Christian churches deeply influenced the perception of the African native people by the European clerics, merchants and officials.[140] At the end of the seventeenth century, the Calvinist Bosman was a chief merchant of the Dutch West Indies Company at Elmina[141] and surveyed the coast several times. In one of his letters, he left the following account:

> The Devil is annually banished all their towns with abundance of ceremony, at an appointed time set apart for that end. I have twice seen it at Axim, where they make the greatest stir about it. This procession is preceded by a Feast of eight days, accompanied with all manner of singing, skipping, dancing, mirth and jollity: in which time a perfect lampooning liberty is allowed, and scandal so highly exalted, that they may freely sing of all the faults, villanies and frauds of their superiours as well as inferiours, without punishment […]. On the eighth day in the morning they hunt out the Devil with a dismal cry, all running one after another, throwing of excrements, stones, wood, or anything they can come at, as thick as hail at Satan's posteriours. When they have driven him far enough out of town, they all return; and thus conclude their eight days divine or rather diabolical service. From hence we may observe that they believe there are more Devils than one, because he is

> driven out of above one hundred towns at the same time. And to make sure that he doth not return to their houses, the women wash and scour all their wooden and earthen vessels very neat to free them from all uncleanness and the Devil. The Negroes of Ante also drive out the Devil in the same manner: but these poor wretches are tormented with a worse Devil, though they call him a God. This is a giant, one side of his body being sound the other rotten, which if any person does but touch he dies immediately; (which I believe without the least scruple). This over-grown Devil, or God, (for the difference is not very great) they endeavour to appease with eatables; to which purpose thousands of pots or troughs of victuals are continually found standing throughout the whole Antese country; so that he must have a worse than canine appetite if he hath not his belly full. They steadfastly believe the apparition of spirits and ghosts. […] They have no other solemn times or festivals, besides that when their harvest is completed, which we call their fair, and that of banishing the Devil.
>
> (Bosman [1705] 1967, pp. 158–159)[142]

This is the description of a typical New Year festival of death and rebirth in agrarian societies, performed at the end of the harvest.[143] Such festivals normally include debauchery ("dancing, mirth and jollity: in which time a perfect lampooning liberty is allowed, and scandal so highly exalted"), inversion behaviors ("they may freely sing of all the faults, villanies and frauds of their superiours"),[144] as well as apotropaic rituals ("they hunt out the Devil with a dismal cry, all running one after another, throwing of excrements, stones, wood, or anything they can come at"). Bosman was not a cleric, but his discourse is clearly marked with the moral tone that characterized the official world vision of the Christian middle and upper milieus toward popular superstitions. But there is something more in this text that may give us a key for a better understanding of that world vision. The devil is the central figure of his account, and Bosman does not distinguish the protective spirits of those communities from the evil spirits, which are the target of the apotropaic actions. Nor does he draw any precise line of demarcation between the concepts of god and devil, since he perceives that locally "the difference is not very great". This is perfectly

consistent with the European Christian tradition of considering the gods of the pagan peoples as devils, and what Bosman does is simply reaffirm this longstanding theological convention. Finally, Bosman's description emphasizes the "lampooning liberty and scandal" associated with the presence of the devil and, at the same time, the inversion aspects of the festival, thus conveying the image of a Sabbath-like event. Indeed, the overlapping of these aspects with the ritual devil-hunt takes on a family resemblance with the contemporary European witch-hunts. Apart the possible dialectical relation of witchcraft practices with rituals of reversal, which we have touched on in the previous paragraph, Bosman's description seems to suggest a further direction for future research and analysis: the relation between the contemporary extra-European witchcraft beliefs and the jurisdictional action carried out by the Church since the beginning of the missionary enterprise.

Bosman's account does not say to what extent those native communities had been converted to Christianity, no matter if they were still performing their traditional festival, since we know that the same Abisa festival continues to be performed even nowadays. Missionary presence had been systematically organized on the coast of Mina since the 1480s – 200 years before Bosman's writings. Pope Sixtus IV, on August 21, 1471, ordered the Archbishop of Lisbon to take care that churches be built all along Africa's coast.[145] Ten years later, on June 21, 1481, the same pope renewed Eugene IV's and Callistus III's grant to the Order of the Knights of Christ of spiritual jurisdiction over all churches in West Africa.[146] The coast of the Congo was systematically evangelized from 1486 onwards, and members of the local courts were brought to Portugal to receive baptism. A letter of Diogo de Alvarenga to King Manuel (18 August 1503) announces that the king of Acomane [*Komenda*] desires to convert to Christianity and mentions the baptism of the king of Afuto [*Fetu*].[147] In 1534, Pope Paul III issued a bull for the creation of the diocese of S. Tomé, with jurisdiction from the coast of Mina to the Cape of Good Hope.[148] In 1572, a group of Augustinians arrived at St. Jorge (Elmina), where they carried out an intensive apostolate.[149] "Before 1576 was over, the Paramount Chief of Efutu along with six of his sons and three of his nephews was baptized (the other Efutu chief baptized in 1503 was long dead). The Paramount chief of Komenda too was converted".[150]

Demonization of native ideas and behaviors is clearly the product of the bigoted education Bosman received in his Calvinist family and milieu. His account, indeed, raises some questions. Historical and ethnographic literatures show striking similarities between European and extra-European witchcraft beliefs in areas where Catholic missionary presence was ancient and particularly intense. The common bulk of beliefs on the coast of West Africa,[151] as well as in Spanish America, include night-flights, metamorphosis of witches in any kind of animals, sexual orgies, incest, ritual killing and cannibalism. As to America, a good example is that of the Navahos,[152] whose conversion to Christianity dates as far back as the second half of the seventeenth century due to the evangelization carried out in Sonora and Arizona by the Jesuit Eusebio Francesco Chino, better known as Father Kino.[153] Ethnographic information that Kluckhohn gathered from his Navaho informants[154] was carefully compared with what the Franciscan Fathers had written on the local witchcraft beliefs.[155]

We should wonder to what extent such similarities are the bilateral output of cultural encounter and genealogically related to the jurisdictional action of the Church from the fifteenth century onwards. However, this question is somewhat misleading, because similarities, though not that striking, may be found as well in areas where evangelization was neither ancient nor intense.[156] Nevertheless, it is necessary to stress the point that evangelization on the coast of West Africa and in the Americas started and developed during the peak period of the European witch-hunts, while the subsequent systematic missionary presence – which was made possible under colonialism in Africa – and the spread of Christianity in Oceania date no further back than the early or mid-nineteenth century,[157] an age when Europeans had more or less forgotten about witchcraft and witch-hunts. Certainly, the cultural encounter during the centuries of European expansion favored the construction of reciprocal representations, like the demonization of local beliefs and practices witnessed by Bosman's account. Moreover, the creation of institutions like merchant companies and trading posts, missions and dioceses[158] provided a framework for the jurisdictional action of civil and religious European institutions, which had been strongly exercised for many generations outside Europe in the age of the witch-hunts. The missionary enterprises in the colonial era, then, worked on the basis of those representations transmitting to the present Christian

communities and religious institutions a heritage of ideas in which ancient African and European beliefs were merged in a single doctrine.

I wish to present here ethnographic evidence of this heritage, quoting a document circulating among the members of a Facebook religious group[159] directed by a would-be Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams – very probably a former Catholic priest – showing the jurisdictional action of the churches and their struggle for the control of souls. The text is as follows:

> *KNOWLEDGE SEX IN THE DREAM WHICH SPIRIT CAN BE OPERATING*
>
> The incubus is a lewd demon, which seeks sexual intercourse with women. It is also termed follet (French), alp (German), duende (Spanish) and folletto (Italian). The corresponding demon who appears to men is the succubus. When associated with one particular witch or sorcerer, both incubus and succubus are known as magistellus, or "familiar". Inasmuch as the nightmare dream is sexual in latent content, incubus is often used interchangeably with The Mare Demon; in fact, the Latin word for nightmare is incubo (to lie upon). The incubus can assume either a male or a female shape. Sometimes he appears as a full-grown man. Sometimes as a satyr or in the form of a demon, and if it is a woman who has been received as a witch, the incubus generally assumes the form of an animal. Succubus is a demon in female form, specialized in seducing men. Although feminine in meaning, the Latin word, succubus, is masculine (because demons were supposedly sexless) the feminine form succuba (strumpet) is occasionally found. If you have, or are having dreams or nightmares of a sexual nature that you know are as real as life, dreams where you cannot exactly distinguish the real from the unreal, please seek DELIVERANCE. Don't allow Satan and his demonic hosts to degrade your body which is the Temple of God.
>
> The demon MARE: Works with the Incubus and Succubus demons. This demon is alleged to cause dreams of sexual content coupled with those evil spirits.

NIGHT SPELLS: Charms or enchantments by night, used by witches and warlocks.

NIGHTMARE or MARE: The demon or mare alleged to cause bad dreams. The dream itself is called a nightmare.

MARE: The supposed demon which, during the night, sits on the chest and causes feelings of suffocation and choking. Causing a feeling of being paralyzed and that the weight is crushing the breath out of a person. TYPE A BIG AMEN IF U WANT GOD 2 FREE FROM SUCH SEXUAL INTERCOURSE.[160]

In this text, the reader can easily recognize the elements of the medieval demonology, which we examined in the previous paragraphs, together with the idea of the reality of dreams ("dreams … that you know are as real as life, dreams where you cannot exactly distinguish the real from the unreal"). We shall argue that this idea is not only part of various "dream cultures" but is constitutive of the principle of reality that popular as well as intellectual milieus shared during the centuries of medieval and early modern Europe and that still dominates the mental horizon of many African people.

Then, further questions deserve to be asked, which suggest promising lines for future research: to what extent is it possible to reconstruct the jurisdictional action of the Church outside Europe in the field of witchcraft beliefs during the centuries of European expansion? To what extent does the colonial and anthropological construction of witchcraft depend on the reciprocal representations produced by the cultural encounter of the previous centuries? And, finally, to what extent does the jurisdictional action of the missionary churches in the twentieth century depend on that colonial and anthropological construction of witchcraft?[161]

Notes

1 João de Barros ([1552] 1628, Decada Primeira, Livro Terceiro). Diogo Cão, with João Afonso de Aveiro, is credited with the discovery of the kingdoms of Benin and Congo. See also Brásio (1952, pp. 32–35); Rui de Pina ([1492] 1989, pp. 57).

2 "Priests who could teach him the Catholic faith" João de Barros ([1552] 1628: Decada Primeira, Livro Terceiro, Capitulo III, Fol. 41); Brásio (1952, pp. 53 ff.).

3 On 12 December 1462, the Franciscan Alfonso de Bolano was appointed by Pope Pius II as Prefect of Missions in Guinea (Jordão 1868, pp. 41). King João II sent to the Congo a group of

Franciscan friars in 1490 (Soledade 1705, p. 119). See also Brásio (1952, 1958); Wiltgen (1956).

4 The contemporary sources inform us that Portugal established an important alliance with the Congo, whose kings and their families were rapidly converted to Christianity. See Garcia de Resende ([1545] 1752, cap. CLV, pp. 67 ff.); João de Barros ([1552] 1628, Decada Primeira, Livro Terceiro, Fol. 39 ff.). For a collection of documents concerning the relations between Portugal, the Holy See and the kingdom of Congo in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, see Brásio (1944, 1952, 1953) and Witte (1986).

5 "Mas como el rey de Benij era mui subiecto a suas idolatrias, e maes pedia aos sacerdotes por se fazer poderoso contra seus vizinhos cõ favor nosso que cõ desejo de baptismo" (João de Barros (1552] 1628: Decada Primeira, Livro Terceiro, Capitulo III, folio 41).

6 The story of Sunjata is the object of an oral epic, of which two variants are published: the first was edited in French in 1960 by the Guinean historian Djibril Tamsir Niane ([1965] 2006) who had collected the oral text from the griot (*djeli*) Mamoudou Kouyaté in the village of Djeliba Koro in Guinea. The second was collected during a performance of the Malian griot Fa-Digi Sisoko at Kita (Mali) in 1968 and later translated into English and published by Johnson (1986). A checklist of the various versions published and unpublished is in Bulman (1997). On the historical and philological problems raised by this epic, see mainly Austen ed. (1999); see also Conrad (2010) and Jansen (2000).

7 This empire, known as Manding, reached its apogee in a period between the reign of Sunjata Keïta ("Sundiata was a real king who, from 1235–55, ruled the empire of Mali. He founded the second major kingdom created by local rulers to profit from the desert trade with North Africans", Chappell 2006: vii) and that of Mansa Musa (who reigned between 1300 and 1337). See also Levtzion (1973, pp. 57 ff.).

8 Osei Tutu's birth is shrouded in legend: "some time in the 1660s" as Daaku writes (1976, p. 18); whereas the year of his death (1712?, 1717?, 1730?) has given rise to a historiographic debate (see Boahen 1975). The reconstruction of Osei Tutu's biography relies on primary and secondary sources. Among the former, there is a manuscript consisting of a group of texts written, or most probably dictated, by Nana Agyeman Prempeh I, the king of the Asante whom the British deposed and exiled in 1896, and partly completed with information collected from other written sources (old notes, annals and chronologies written by Islamic men of letters and in the possession of the Asante Court). This group of writings is known as *HAK* (*History of Asante Kings*) and is supplemented by some other writings classified as *OA/OY* (*Otti Akenten/Obi Yeboa*). All this material has been recently published in a critical edition (Boahen *et al.* eds., 2003). Furthermore, there are oral sources collected and registered by Agyeman-Duah, and conserved in the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana at Legon (Agyeman-Duah 1960–62). A European primary source is Bosman ([1705] 1967, pp. 75–76) who reports some information about "Zay [*Osei*] king of Asiante" and his military enterprises against Denkyira. Secondary sources are of two categories: on the one hand, the works of authors who, between the end of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century, collected the oral sources that were then available: Fuller (1921, pp. 8–10, 23); Rattray (1923, pp. 57, 180, 283 ff.; 1929, pp. 72 ff., 272; Reindorf ([1895] 2007, pp. 51–59)); on the other, the works of some more recent historians: Boahen (1975); Daaku (1970, 1976); Fynn (1966, 1971); McCaskie (1995); Pescheux (2003); Terray (1995); Ward (1948); Wilks (1975).

9 The Asante Confederacy, after defeating Denkyira in the historical battle of Feyase in 1701, established its hegemony in a wide area of present-day Ghana and Ivory Coast.

10 Niane ([1965] 2006, p. 63).

11 In the Manding world, the hunters were a specialized body of hunting practitioners in possession of witchcraft knowledge and prophecy. See also Cissé (1964, 1994). Austen (1986, p. 388) refers to a "hunting idiom of the entire epic", which would contrast "starkly with the linkage between human sexuality and agriculture in the Manding creation myths".

12 'Griot': story-teller, poet and musician. The griots were specialized courtiers in the West African kingdoms.
13 The tree of *so* is the karite (*Butyrospermum parkii*).
14 See Levtzion (1973, pp. 58 ff.). Some historical information contained in the various versions of the oral epic of Sunjata can also be found in early Arab sources (see Cuoq 1985; Levtzion and Hopkins 2000).
15 The majority of the Akan societies – including the Asante – follow the matrilineal descent rule.
16 An oracle-spirit and its priest-diviner.
17 Daaku (1976, p. 18).
18 The suffix *-hene* denotes the supreme authority of a precolonial Akan state.
19 Fynn (1971, p. 29).
20 "Tutu's bold and majestic appearance in addition to his personal beauty, so gained Ansa's love, that he then and there made him his male-consort. It is fashionable with the Twi kings for any woman to whom they take a fancy to become the king's wife. When the fancy is for a male person, a connection is formed of tender love, esteem and protection" (Reindorf [1895] 2007, p. 52). "When Akoto [*Ansa Sasraku*] saw Ossai Tutu he said 'I love you dearly, my soul has come to you, and I love you as I love my wife so I take you as a manly wife'. Since then on the Asantehenes are considered the 'male wives' of the Akwamuhenes, and when a king of the Akwamu dies, the Asantehene sends an ambassador with leaves tied to his hair according to the Akan custom that obliges widows to express their mourning in that way" ([HAK 54, p. 7; 55, p. 13] Boahen *et al*. 2003, p. 126). The "manly wife" is a peculiar Akan custom of strong friendship between two men, most probably without any homosexual implication, as Wilks argues (2001, pp. xl–xli).
21 *Ɔkɔmfo* (formerly translated as fetish priest) denotes the condition of someone who takes care of a spirit by whom he (or she) is possessed.
22 According to Daaku (1976, p. 17), Obiri Yeboa, "during one war with the Doma, lost his life some time in the 1680s".
23 Every family of griots (*djeli*) accompanies a family of warrior-kings (*diatigui*). The *djeli* is inseparable from his *diatigui*, and one cannot exist without the other. Bala Fasseké, the griot of Sunjata, gave origin to the griot lineage known as Kouyaté, which is still active nowadays, and to whom the griot who sang the version of the epic collected by Niane belongs.
24 Niane ([1965] 2006, p. 39).
25 "The student of Ashanti law and custom, however, continually receives in answer to the question, 'Why is such and such a rule observed?' the reply, 'We do not know; Komfo Anotche [*Ɔkɔmfo Anɔkye*] made this a law' " (Rattray 1929, pp. 279–280).
26 Niane ([1965] 2006, p. 58).
27 See also Fage (1988, p. 76).
28 The Portuguese expansion was legitimized by various papal bulls (see Baumgarten 1965–1986, vol. 4 "Eugenio IV-Pio IX an. 1431–1862"; Witte 1956).
29 See Brásio (1953, 1958).
30 Manuel succeeded João II and reigned from 1495 to 1521.
31 Joh. Francisci Poggii Florentini, *Emanuelis Portugalliae Regis Elogium*, c. 1502. The original manuscript is in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence (BML, Codex Laurent. Ashburn. 1077). A printed publication was edited by Guido Battelli in 1934 (see Bracciolini 1934) with an interesting foreword by the then-ambassador of Portugal to the Holy See, Henrique Trindade Coelho. This *Elogium* was written after Vasco da Gama's voyage to India (1497–1499) or, more probably, after the subsequent voyage of Pedro Alvares Cabral (1500–1501), but before the expedition to the New World in 1501–1502 by the Florentine Amerigo Vespucci, who was serving under the Portuguese Crown, since there is no mention of this latter enterprise in the text. The information about the voyages of Vasco da Gama and Pedro Alvares

Cabral was immediately available in Florence through the letters written from Lisbon in 1500 and 1501 by the Florentine merchant Girolamo Sernigi published by Giovanni Battista Ramusio ([1550–1559] 1978, pp. 603–617). Poggio Bracciolini Jr., or, more precisely, Giovanni Francesco di Poggio Fiorentino (b. 1443 – d. 1522), prelate and secretary of Pope Leo X (1513–1521), was one of the five children of the more famous Poggio Bracciolini ([Poggius Florentinus] b. 1380 – d. 1469).

32 See Cattaneo (2008); Melis (1990).

33 For example, the Venetian Alvise da Ca' da Mosto, and the Genoese Antoniotto Usodimare in the fifteenth century; the Florentine Amerigo Vespucci in the first years of the sixteenth century.

34 From the late fifteenth and the early sixteenth century, Italian merchants were operating in Lisbon, including Girolamo Sernigi and Bartolomeo Marchionni from Florence and Alberto Cantino from Ferrara, the man who in 1502 brought to Italy the famous map that bears his name, now held in the Biblioteca Estense of Modena (BEU, C.G.A2). The *Codice Vaglienti* (RICC, ms. 1910, c. 1513, see Formisano 2006) is a valuable collection of texts and letters from 1499 to 1513 witnessing the complexity of the economic relations between Italy, and Florence in particular, and Portugal.

35 We cannot share Voltaire's disdainful criticism: "Gama in a storm addresses his prayers to Christ, but it is Venus who comes to his relief; the heroes are Christians and the poet heathen" (quoted by William Julius Mickle in the introduction to his nineteenth century English translation of the Poem, see Camões 1877).

36 See Clark (2002); Levack ed. (1992a); Zambelli (1996).

37 Manuel's deeds are presented as having their foundation in Isaiah's prophetic words: " 'Populus qui sedebat in tenebris videt lucem magnam' … Quis non videt modo esse impleta? Dum insulas multas ante ignotas, variasque gentes rudes et prorsus mente caecas et feras ad Christum convertisti … tibi Emanuelis non inconvenit nomen, quod nobiscum Deus interpretatur" (" 'A people who were seated in darkness will see a great light'. Who does not see that these words are now reality? You have converted to Christianity many unknown islands and blind-minded savage peoples. You deserve the name of Emanuel that is interpreted as God with us").

38 The mention of Bacchus/Dionysus in both texts is made with reference to the deeds of this mythological deity in the Orient. In *The Lusiads*, Camões presents Bacchus as opposing Jupiter's proposal of granting the Portuguese the fate of dominating the seas, fearing that they would obscure his fame: "O padre Baco ali não consentia/No que Júpiter disse, conhecendo/Que esquecerão seus feitos no Oriente,/Se lá passar a Lusitana gente" (Canto I: 30).

39 "Cessem do sábio Grego e do Troiano/As navegações grandes que fizeram;/Cale-se de Alexandro e de Trajano/A fama das vitórias que tiveram;/Que eu canto o peito ilustre Lusitano,/A quem Neptuno e Marte obedeceram:/Cesse tudo o que a Musa antígua canta,/Que outro valor mais alto se alevanta" (Canto I: 3).

40 "E também, porque a santa Providência / Que em Júpiter aqui se representa" (Canto X: 83).

41 "Passaram ainda além da Taprobana" (Canto I: 1). "A nobre ilha também de Taprobana,/Já pelo nome antigo tão famosa … /dará tributo à Lusitana Bandeira" (Canto X: 51). Poggio's *Elogium* says: "Quis namque crederet Portugallenses ad Indiae littora venturos? Et quod mirabilius est, Taprobanae etiam imperaturos, quam neque Bacchus prius, neque Hercules, neque quisquam alius armis umquam attigisse legitur?" (Who will believe that the Portuguese would reach India's coasts? And, what is even more marvelous, that they would rule the island of Taprobana that neither Bacchus nor Hercules, nor any other had reached before?). Taprobana, which Camões eventually identifies with Ceylon, is a fabulous island that Pliny the Elder describes in his *Naturalis Historia* as being beyond the known world ("Taprobanam insulam, immo verius alterum orbem a Geographis nuncupatam, vel iuxta Plini sententiam extra orbem sitam" *Elogium* cit.). The island of Taprobana, distinct from Ceylon, is marked in Fra Mauro's world map (1459?, BNM), and in a fifteenth-century anonymous portolano, dated probably 1457 (BNCF,

Portolano n. 1), but is not present in the famous Cantino map of 1502 (BEU, C.G.A.2), nor in any other of the Portuguese maps of the early sixteenth century (see, for example, the Diogo Ribeiro map of 1529, BAV, Borg. Carte Naut. III).

42 It is noteworthy that no mention is made in the two texts of the hundreds of deaths that occurred during the century of the Portuguese expansion, from the expeditions of Henry the Navigator to the mid-sixteenth century. The weak or unfortunate people who died by various diseases or in battles did not deserve the same tribute of honor that was given the incorruptible heroes.

43 "Quando os Deuses no Olimpo luminoso,/Onde o governo está da humana gente,/Se ajuntam em concílio glorioso/Sobre as cousas futuras do Oriente…. Se do grande valor da forte gente/De Luso não perdeis o pensamento,/Deveis de ter sabido claramente,/Como é dos fados grandes certo intento,/Que por ela se esqueçam os humanos/De Assírios, Persas, Gregos e Romanos" (Canto I: 20, 24).

44 "Deus pro te proeliabitur, sicut pro … David puerum atque inermem contra fortissimum gigantem armatum in duello adiuvit…. Taceo complures alios qui divino muniti praesidio magnos triumphos de hostibus saepenumero reportarunt" (God will fight for you, as he helped the unarmed child David against the armed and very strong giant. I do not talk about many others who, provided with divine help, very often reported great triumphs against their enemies).

45 See Ankarloo and Clark eds. (1996, 2002); Ankarloo and Henningsen eds. (1993); Baroja (2001); Barry, Hester and Roberts eds. (1996); Behringer (2004); Cohn (1975); Hansen (1900, 1901); Lea (1939); Levack (1987); Monter (1969); Robbins (1959); Trevor-Roper (1967). Particularly for witchcraft in England, see Ewen (1929); Gibson ed. (2003); Macfarlane (1970); Notestein (1911); Rosen ed. (1991); Thomas (1971). For a bibliography on European witchcraft, see Coumont (2004).

46 See Levack ed. (2001). See also Clark (2002, and particularly pp. 147 ff. for beliefs in natural philosophy and magic among intellectuals). See Behringer (2007) for Catholic and Protestant demonological treatises.

47 Geschiere (1997, p. 12).

48 See, for example, "Nicolas of Cusa (b. 1401 – d. 1464) who had doubted the reality of witchcraft in the fifteenth century" (Behringer 2007, p. 413).

49 See Barry (1996); Bever (2009); Levack (1999). Michel de Montaigne (b. 1533 – d. 1592) was "fideistically rational and skeptically devout". Reginald Scot (b. 1538 – d. 1599), author of a renowned book on witchcraft (1584), believed in the reality of witchcraft but saw as illusory many of the fears and beliefs associated with it". Thomas Hobbes' (b. 1588 – d. 1679) "thoroughgoing materialism left no room for spirits, evil or good, and he engaged in an often ironic metaphorical reinterpretation of his culture's beliefs". Baruch Spinoza's (b. 1632 – d. 1677) "pantheistic monism and naturalist mechanism invalidated such beliefs as well, and he attributed all demonology to philosophical naïveté and to historically conditioned sectarian corruptions of our understanding of God and of the harmonious universe which manifests him" (Kors and Peters 2001, pp. 393, 402).

50 The Witchcraft Act of 1735 marked a complete reversal in attitudes. Penalties for the practice of witchcraft as traditionally constituted, which by that time was considered by many influential figures to be an impossible crime, were replaced by penalties for the pretense of witchcraft. A person who claimed to have the power to call up spirits, or foretell the future, or cast spells, or discover the whereabouts of stolen goods, was to be punished, subject to fines and imprisonment. The Act applied to the whole of Great Britain, repealing both the 1563 Scottish Act and the 1604 English Act.

51 We cannot but agree with Geschiere when he affirms: "It is significant that the most promising impulses for renewing the study of witchcraft and understanding its potential modernity come from authors who distance themselves from a moralizing discourse, and to whom the distinction between good and evil is not self-evident" (Geschiere 1997, p. 220). Important contributions in

this perspective are some recent works by Geschiere, Meyer and Pels eds. (2008); Meyer (1999); Meyer and Pels eds. (2003); Patterson and Macintyre eds. (2011).

52 See Macfarlane (1970, 1982, 1999); Thomas (1963, 1971). An anthropological perspective is also adopted by Ginzburg (1983, 1991), even though it is not possible to describe his approach as truly cross-cultural. See the analyses of Burke (1993) and Rowland (1993, pp. 169 ff.).

53 See also Hutton (2004).

54 See Douglas (1970).

55 Geschiere (1997, pp. 222–223).

56 See also Monter (1969); Zilboorg (1935).

57 Moulinier-Brogi (2013, pp. 59 ff.).

58 See particularly *De Doctrina Christiana* and *De Civitate Dei* (Augustine 1995, 2009).

59 For the struggle against the ancient German beliefs, see the *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae* (Capitulary for the Saxon Regions) issued around 780 by Charlemagne (see also Decker 2008, p. 4).

60 See Linehan and Nelson eds. (2001).

61 See, among others, Mitre Fernández (2007); Hunter *et al*. eds. (2005); Lambert (2002); Morghen (1958); Roach (2003); Roach *et al*. eds. (2013); Volpe (1922). For an anthropological approach to medieval heresies, see Asad (1986).

62 See, for example, the anonymous pamphlet *Errores Gazariorum* (the errors of the Cathars) of 1437 where Gazarii (the Cathars) means witches (Kors and Peters 2001, p. 159).

63 See Decker (2008, pp. 85 ff.).

64 "Our records inform us that in the 1580s, roughly, the preoccupations of inquisitors turned heavily from the pursuit of Protestantism in Italy to crimes of sortilege and magic, which came to account for over 40 per cent of their activity…. Among them were ecclesiastics in large numbers employing and abusing sacramental paraphernalia and liturgical rites and prayers, sometimes with, but often without, formal apostasy to the devil" (Tedeschi 1993, p. 85).

65 "Tutti quelli c'hanno fatto patto o esplicitamente o implicitamente, ò per sé ò per altri, col Demonio" (Masini 1621, pp. 16, 19).

66 See Thomas Aquinas ([XIII C.] 1593); Burchard, bishop of Worms ([ca. 1008] [1549] 1853); Nicolaus Eymerich ([ca. 1376] 1585); John of Salisbury ([1154] 1909); Gratianus Magister ([ca. 1140] 1518); Johannes Nider ([1435–38] 1602); Regino of Prüm ([906] 1840). Excerpts from some of these authors are published in Kors and Peters eds. (2001).

67 Regino prescribes that men and women following the diabolical arts of witchcraft and sorcery should be expelled from their parishes, according to St. Paul's letter to Titus, 3, pp. 10–11, where the apostle says that heretics should be expelled after two warnings, because "Subversi sunt et a diabolo capti tenentur, qui derelicto creatore suo, a diabolo suffragia querunt" ("Those who have abandoned their Creator and ask favors to the devil, are subverted and have been taken by the devil" Reginonis Abbatis Prumiensis [906] 1840, pp. 354 ff.).

68 See Laughlin (2011). See also Grambo (1973); Grunebaum and Caillois eds. (1966).

69 See ethnographic evidence in a document – circulating within a Facebook religious group in Ghana – that I quote at the end of this chapter, and my contribution (Witchcraft and Dream. A Discussion of the Akan case) in the present volume. See also Lattas (1993) and the interesting case reported by Grubb (1911, pp. 129 ff.), and analyzed by De Martino: "The missionary Grubb was accused by a Paraguayan Indian of having stolen gourds from his garden; the only basis of his accusation was that he had seen him do this in a dream. Although the missionary tried to convince the native of his innocence, the latter persisted, saying that Grubb must have taken the gourds, as the dream had showed him entering the garden and carrying them away" (De Martino 1988, p. 124).

70 See the very realistic dramas by Eduardo De Filippo (*Le voci di dentro* and *Non ti pago*) showing episodes of daily life in twentieth-century Naples in which dreams play a fundamental

and paradoxical role in social relations.

71 "De mulieribus, quae cum daemonibus se dicunt nocturnis horis equitare…. Quaedam sceleratae mulieres retro post satanam conversae, daemonum illusionibus et phantasmatibus seductae, credunt se et profitentur nocturnis horis cum Diana paganorum Dea et innumera multitudine mulierum equitare super quasdam bestias…. Nam innumera multitudo hac falsa opinione decepta haec vera esse credit et credendo a recta fide deviat et in errorem paganorum revolvitur" ("About women who claim to ride in the night with demons. Some bad women, followers of Satan, seduced by the illusions of the demons, believe that in the nights and with a crowd of other women, they ride on some beasts. Many people, deceived by such a false opinion, believe this to be true and therefore return to the errors of the heathens") (Regino of Prüm, [906] 1840, chapter CCCLXXI). The reference to this same goddess Diana or Herodias is found in Burchard's *Decretum* of c. 1008 (see Burchard bishop of Worms [c. 965–1025] [1549] 1853).

72 "[ipse satanas] cum mentem cuiuscunque mulierculae ceperit, illico transformat se in diversarum personarum species atque similitudines, et mentem quam captivam tenet, in somnis deludens, modo laeta, modo tristia, modo cognitas, modo incognitas personas ostendens, et cum solus eius spiritus hoc patitur, infidelis mens haec non in animo, sed in corpore evenire opinatur. Quis enim non in somnis et nocturnis visionibus extra se ipsum educitur et multa videt dormiendo, quae numquam viderat vigilando?" ("having Satan in his power the mind of certain women, there he transforms himself in various persons and things deceiving during dreams and showing some happy, some unhappy, some known, some unknown people, and [*the dreamer*] feels all that to happen not in the mind but in the body. Who has never been brought out of himself during dreams and night visions and seen many things that never would see when waking?") (Regino of Prüm, [906] 1840, chapter CCCLXXI).

73 "Infidelis mens haec non in animo, sed in corpore evenire opinatur. Quis vero tam stultus et hebes sit, qui haec omnia, quae in solo spiritu fiunt, etiam in corpore accidere arbitretur?" (Regino [906] 1840, pp. 354 ff.). A slight different English translation is in Kors and Peters eds. (2001, p. 78).

74 "Pater quidam nostri ordinis villaggium quoddam intravit, ubi femina quandam invenit dementatam in tantum, ut nocturno tempore se cum Diana, et aliis feminis transferri crederet per aera. Cui cum patre perfidiam verbis conaretur expellere salubribus, pertinax ista experientiae se plus credere affirmavit…. Igitur ut deliram animarum zelator convinceret, adveniente die recessus, quem vetula prefixerat, affuit pater cum fide dignis hominibus. At illa cubellam in qua pasta formari solet supra scannum positam intravit, et sedere ibi coepit, applicatisque verbis maleficis et unguento, reclinato capite obdormivit. Statimque opere daemonis somnia de domina Venere, et de aliis superstitionibus tam fortia habuit, ut in iubilo quodam voce submissa clamitaret, et in his plausibus, motis manibus, cubellam cui insidebat nimis movit, quae de alto scamno praecepitanter ruens velutae subiectum caput non modicum contrivit: et ita in terra iacentem, nec de loco motam pater inclamavit iam evigilantem. Ubi queso es? Num cum Diana fuisti, quae testimonio praesentium nunquam de cubella recessisti? Ex his igitur gestis et mediantibus verbis salutiferis animum ad sui erroris detestationem devexit" (Iohannes Nider [1435–38] 1602, "De somniorum differentiis, de causis eorum, et de deceptis per somnia et visiones." Lib. II, Cap IV, p. 123). See also Manselli (1976, p. 213); Kors and Peters eds. (2001, pp. 155 and ff.).

75 Like the mystical experience of St. Paul who was transported to the third heaven ("I do not know whether with the body or outside the body", Second Letter to the Corinthians, 12, 2–5).

76 Decker (2008, p. 9).

77 Id., p. 10.

78 Kors and Peters eds, (2001, pp. 149–151).

79 "Not without reason a sort of magic charm was perceived in the Catholic doctrines" (Bezold 1886, p. 2. My translation).

80 Decker (2008, p. 50).

81 The German Dominican Fathers Henricus Institor (Heinrich Kramer, O. P., b. 1430 – d. 1505) and Jakob Sprenger, O. P. (b. 1436 – d. 1495) are the authors of the most famous canonical treatise on the prosecution of witchcraft (see Institoris [1487] 1492 and 1596). For a critical edition see Mackay (2009); see also Broedel (2003); Decker (2008, pp. 50 ff.); Kors and Peters eds. (2001, pp. 180–229).

82 Behringer (2007, p. 409).

83 For the demonology of the Reformation, see Behringer (2007). As for England, the most influential seventeenth-century treatise was that of the famous witch-finder Matthew Hopkins [1647].

84 Kors and Peters eds. (2001, p. 194).

85 For a discussion of the problem of the relation between witchcraft and *sodomia* in the Middle Ages and early modern Europe, see Herzig (2003). See Geschiere (2013, pp. 1–2, 217 n. 2) for the link of witchcraft with homosexuality in Africa.

86 See Kors and Peter eds. (2001, mainly chapters VIII and IX). See also Ankarloo and Clark eds. (2002).

87 Rowland (1993, p. 173); see also Rowland (1996). "In England the concept of witches having some form of acquaintance with the devil dates back to medieval times, but the detailed framework of demonology, which was being formulated by Continental theologians during the fifteenth century, only really began to influence educated English notions of witchcraft during the Elizabethan period. Most of those Continental treatises were written in Latin and remained untranslated at the time. So, the ideas they contained about devil-worshipping witches having bestial sexual relations with the devil, entering pacts, and attending orgiastic Sabbaths, only slowly entered the popular consciousness through the filter of publications by learned English clergymen and gentlemen" (Davies 1999, p. 179).

88 A sixteenth century physician, Johann Wier (Weyer) "the author of what was to become the most influential early modern book against witch persecutions [*De lamiis, 1577*], viewed so-called witches as melancholic females who needed leniency, love, and medical care to cure their mental illness" (Behringer 2007, p. 411).

89 The rituals of reversal (see, for example, Bateson 1936; Perrot 1967) are often considered a particular category of the *rites de passage* (Gennep 1909). Studies on "rituals of reversal" were inspired in the 1960s by Gluckman (1963) and Turner (1969).

90 See Muchembled (1993, pp. 148 ff.). For the social and cultural environment of the witch-hunt in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in southwestern Germany, see also Midelfort (1972, 2013). The *Sacro Arsenale* of Eliseo Masini defines witches as: "Quelli che vanno a ballo o, come si suol dire, in striozzo" (Those who go to dance or, as it is said, in *striozzo*) (Masini 1621, p. 21). The term *striozzo*, from *stria* (witch), belongs to old northern Italian dialects, and derives from the Latin *strix*, owl, from which the Italian *strega* (witch) also comes; it denotes the nocturnal witches' activity, but in later times it meant all types of sorcery: one example is in a Venetian vernacular short poem (Pezzotti 1851). In the popular discourse of rural folk in some areas of northern Italy, *striozzo* was also used to mean licentious feasts (personal information). For this issue see also Decker (2008, pp. 113 ff.). Nocturnal gatherings, perhaps with sexual orgies, often happened and were assimilated to the witches' Sabbaths by right-thinking people. In northern Italy, for example, an often licentious dancing feast, the *ganzéga*, was performed during the last evening of the cereal harvest (Vecchi 1963); an even more popular form of night meeting, often characterized by brawls and licentiousness, was known as *trebbo* (from Lat. *trivium*), with the basic meaning as place of meeting and dancing (Coco 1963). The following quotation can show how similar was the situation in England: "In Cambridgeshire witches were thought to have gathered at night in the fields around the village of Horseheath. They frolicked and danced, and on returning in the early hours of the morning were seen to be in a terrible state

of perspiration…. Contrary to the theological notion that witches met at Sabbaths to show allegiance to the Devil and perform obscene and perverted sexual acts, it would seem that in folk tradition these gatherings were considered as harmless social events" (Davies 1999, pp. 185–186).

91 See the work of the physician Hecker (1832), who analyzes several episodes of choreomania that happened in Germany from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries and interprets them according to a clinical hypothesis of collective hysteria determined by the epidemics and famines that hit Europe in the Lower Middle Ages. Phenomena of choreomania were also associated with evil magic, as is witnessed by the legend of the *Zauberflöte* (the magic flute). Prosperi (1978, p. 179 n. 42) reports an episode of choreomania that exploded as a collective delirium in the State of the Church in 1540, caused by a serious famine, and accompanied by heretical beliefs and rituals. These phenomena have been compared with the southern Italian Tarantism (see De Martino 2005), with which they have much in common. An eighteenth-century dissertation by the physician Luigi Toti (BG, manuscript *Il Tarantismo Riprovato*, 1784) associates Apulian Tarantism with popular choreomania, female hysteria and male hypochondria (see Grazioli 1996). See also the well-documented work on Dionysian cults by Jeanmaire (1951).

92 Licentious dancing was considered morally shameful also in the Reformed milieus. Bezold witnesses that in Protestant preaching books was often affirmed that "The punishment of dancers in the Hell was dancing for the whole eternity on sharp nails and wrapped in flames, because dancing and stretching their arms they had been mocking the Christ Crucified, and singing they derided His last cry". (Bezold 1886, p. 164).

93 "Franciscans like Samuel de Cassinis (in *De lamiis quas strigas vocant*, Milan 1505) questioned the assumptions underpinning Kramer's inquisitorial demonology" (Behringer 2007, p. 409). See also Bezold (1886, p. 165).

94 Decker (2008, p. 213). Schulte (2001, p. 83) shows that the number of women convicted and executed for witchcraft in Germany was higher in Lutheran than in Catholic areas.

95 Words used in a letter written by the Antistes (President of the Reformed pastoral synod in Zurich), Johann Rudolf Ulrich, to the pastor of Glarus in 1781, during the trial of Anna Göldi (Decker 2008, p. 199).

96 In England, the first act against witchcraft was Henry VIII's Act of 1542. This statute was repealed in the reign of Elizabeth I, who issued in 1562 the Act against Conjurations, Enchantments and Witchcrafts. In 1604, with the support of the majority of the members of the aristocracy and the high Anglican clergy, King James I broadened the Elizabethan Act to bring the penalty of death without benefit of clergy to anyone who invoked evil spirits or communed with familiar spirits (Gibson 2003). In Scotland, with the strong support of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, a Witchcraft Act was issued in 1563 in which both the practice of witchcraft and consulting with witches were considered capital offenses. Later on, the Presbyterians succeeded in having consulters of "Devils and familiar spirits" punished with death. See Boran and Gribben eds. (2006); Goodare (2005). See also Levack ed. (1992b, 1992c).

97 Particularly interesting is the *Daemonologie* written by James VI of Scotland (James I of England) in 1597 (see Tyson 2011); among the sources, see Bodin (1616); Guaccio (1626); Rémy (1596); Torreblanca (1623). See also Summers (1956).

98 Paravy (1981, p. 121, quoted in Kors and Peters, eds. 2001, p. 150). See also Dessì (1980) who argues that the *Malleus Maleficarum* contains the refutation of the *Canon Episcopi* and the demonstration of the reality of the witch night-flight.

99 Trevor-Roper affirms that in the Dark Ages, "there was at least no witch-craze. There were witch beliefs, of course – a scattered folk-lore of peasant superstitions […] the Church disdained these [beliefs that] were the fragmentary rubbish of paganism […]. Church dignitaries declared that night-flying and metamorphosis were hallucinations and whoever believed in them is an infidel and a pagan. This statement was accepted into the canon law and became known as the *Canon*

Episcopi as the official doctrine of the Church […]. In the succeeding centuries, when the craze was being built up, all this salutary doctrine would have to be reversed; to deny the reality of night-flying and metamorphosis would be officially declared heretical; the witches' Sabbath would become an objective fact. […] By 1490, after two centuries of research, the new positive doctrine of witchcraft would be established in its final form" (1967, pp. 91–92).

100 See also Ginzburg (1993).

101 See Monter (1990, p. 260). See also Gaskill (2008).

102 Ginzburg (1983). The *benandanti* (good travelers) "che sono boni, detti vagabondi et in loro linguaggio benandanti che impediscono il male" (who are good wandering people according to their language are called benandanti and fight against evil), as opposed to *malandanti* (bad travelers) "li stregoni et le streghe quando si partano vanno a far del male" (wizards and witches when they leave go to accomplish evil deeds) (*id*., pp. 5, 6). The *benandanti* were discovered in 1575.

103 Eliade (1975, pp. 154–155).

104 Decker (2008, pp. 82–83).

105 Henningsen (1980, pp. 178–179); Kors and Peters eds. (2001, pp. 408–409).

106 Decker (2008, p. 92).

107 "The witch-hunts were fiercely criticized by the famous humanist lawyer Andrea Alciati (b. 1492 – d. 1550), who labeled these largely illegal procedures the 'new holocaust' and by contemporary scientists such as Henricus Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (b. 1486 – d. 1535), who created and promoted the idea that witchcraft was an inquisitors' invention" (Behringer 2007, p. 410). See also the Scottish Reginald Scot (1584), the German Jesuit Friedrich Spee von Langefeld (1632) and particularly the debate between the skeptic Dutch physician Johan Wier (Weyer 1563, 1577) and the French Jean Bodin (1586), and the booklet published by Ulrich Molitor [1489] "in the style of a dialogue between a fanatic believer in witchcraft with himself as opponent and Archduke Sigmund as the wise arbiter" Behringer (2007: 409). See also Prosperi (1996, 2003, 2010).

108 Anonymous, probably composed c. 1593–1603 by Giulio Monterenzi, consultant to the recently established *Sacra Congregatio Romanae et universalis Inquisitionis seu Sancti Officii* (see Manuscripts).

109 Behringer (2007, p. 419).

110 *Id.*, pp. 420–421. See Gödelmann (1601).

111 "Se una Strega ò Malefica deporrà contro d'un'altra di delitto commesso in tempo, ch'essa deponente era in quella diabolica tragedia, and dirà, d'hauer ciò veduto, all'hora non fa indicio veruno … perché le Streghe, mentre si trouano in quelle sacrileghe danze, dalle illusioni del Diauolo ingannate, veggono per arte diabolica, ò pure stimano di vedere molte cose finte, e false. Onde non si dee in modo alcuno di cosi fatta lor depositione tenere un minimo conto: anzi male and ingiustamente farebbono i Giudici à procedere in tal caso contro le nominate" (Masini 1621, par. CXLI, pp. 302–303).

112 A booklet published in northern Italy by an aristocrat (Baroni 1753) claims to demonstrate the impossibility of the devil transporting human bodies through the air.

113 "That would have been nothing new: The Tribunals of the Roman Inquisition in Italy, notably those of Milan and Como, were places of refuge in the seventeenth century, and even into the eighteenth century, for Catholics, especially children, who were fleeing possible execution as witches" (Decker 2008, p. 234 n. 16).

114 "Tell your compatriots that they are very stupid and foolish". (Decker 2008, p. 196).

115 "Children who vomited needles to attract attention or to accuse their fellow human beings of witchcraft were not at all unusual. There are children and youths who believe their own fantastical constructions and thus manage to put supposedly guilty people in mortal danger. Such

a peril became explosive during the 'witch craze' of the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century" (Decker 2008, p. 198).

116 Michelet (1862). See also Manselli (1976).

117 Kors and Peters eds. (2001, p. 346); Muchembled (1987, pp. 116–201).

118 Decker (2008, p. 214).

119 Decker refers to a series of premature deaths of French kings; to the nephew of the bishop of Bayeux who in 1278 "was executed for the supposed crime of bewitching King Philip III"; and to the trial in 1315 against the French Minister "Enguerrand de Marigny who with a female assistant had supposedly used waxen images to mount a magical attack on the royal family" (Decker (2008, p. 24).

120 *Id*., p. 25.

121 *Id.*, pp. 138–139. The use of wax figures was very widespread also in ecclesiastic milieus. With a bull of 1471, pope Sixtus IV ordered that the fabrication of wax figures (in the form of Agnus Dei) was only reserved to the papacy. These figures were used as talismans against charms. (Bezold 1886, p. 165).

122 Moulinier-Brogi (2013, pp. 59 ff.). The influence of astrology in medicine is witnessed until the sixteenth century (see Lavenia 2013, pp. 163 ff.).

123 Decker (2008, p. 106).

124 An eighth-century abbey on the Esquiline hill in Rome.

125 "The mysterious affair took on overtones of high politics, as this prognosis was noised about and even came to the attention of the Spanish government, which had been having its own troubles with the Francophile pope Urban…. The affair became explosive in the context of the Spanish-French rivalry during the Thirty Years war…. When Richelieu learned of the astrological prediction, he secretly advised the pope to put an end to the affair. Urban himself had an interest in astrology" (Decker 2008, pp. 136–137).

126 Concerning the Sabbath, see the discredited works of Murray (1921, 1952), and the critical work of Ginzburg (1991). See the recent revival of this historical-cultural interest in Wilby (2013).

127 In French, midwife is *sage-femme* (wise woman, an expression also used in Anglophone countries), and this is probably linked to the traditional knowledge credited to those women.

128 Lavenia (2013, pp. 165–167, my translation from Italian).

129 See also Geschiere (2013, chapter 3 "To trust a witch").)

130 "So intimate was the relationship between protective (or remedial) magic and malevolent witchcraft that historians have come to see them more and more as the two inseparable halves of the world of popular culture" (Clark 2002, p. 112).

131 See Cocchiara (1963).

132 See Bakhtin (1984).

133 See also Rowland (1993, p. 166).

134 See Bloch (1989); Boute and Smaberg eds. (2013); Kelly (1988); Kelly and Kaplan (1990); Palumbo (2013); Quigley ed. (2005); Valeri (1985).

135 See Bakhtin (1981, 1984).

136 Kertzer (1988); Tambiah (1985).

137 Comaroff (1985).

138 See also Kaplan (1990).

139 For an overview about relations between religious institutions and popular beliefs, see Larner (1984).

140 The Abisa festival (or Kundum) described by Bosman ([1705] 1967), was originally a harvest (yam) festival marking the end of an agrarian cycle and the beginning of the new year. Abisa was celebrated by the various communities on the coast and is even now celebrated from Sekondi, to the east, to Grand Bassam in Ivory Coast, to the west, throughout the Ahanta and Nzema areas. Axim is a town close to the mouth of the Ankobra River, in the area of the Cape Three Points,

where the Portuguese had built the Fort S. António in 1512–15, which after the Dutch conquest (1642) became the second seat of the Dutch West Indies Company under Elmina, where the company held its African headquarters.

141 Van Dantzig (1974, p. 102).

142 See the analogous description of the festival Apo in Tekyiman offered by Rattray (1923, pp. 153 ff.).

143 See Lanternari (1959).

144 The Abisa festival is still characterized by social inversion, with men dressing as women and vice versa, and political inversion, with the paramount chief deprived of his paraphernalia and ritually insulted by a group of singers (personal ethnographic evidence).

145 The bull *Clara devotionis* (*Alguns documentos* 1456/1892, 20–36–52) was issued a few months after the discovery of the Cape Three Points and the *mina d'ouro* by João de Santarem and Pero de Escobar (see Pereira [c. 1505] 1892, ch. 4, p. 68).

146 Wiltgen (1956, p. 6).

147 ATT (cc – I – 4–32, Corpo Cronologico).

148 ATT (Bulas 17–33).

149 There is an important account in the history of the Augustinian congregation: "Conv. Georgii in Regno Minæ, alias Angolæ in Africa extruitur a nostratibus Lusitanis. Illuc an. 1572 e Lusitania missi fuerunt Patres…. Statim cœperunt Christi Evangelium cum ingenti fructu disseminare, multosque indigenas ad Catholicam fidem converterunt. In urbe Comina [*Komenda*] sex filios illius Regis, qui Philippus vocari cœperat, sacro baptismatis lavacro regeneravit, itemque in Regno Futi [*Fetu*] sex Regis filios lustralibus lymphys Ecclesiæ adjunxit. In præfato S. Georgii cœnobio instituta fuit Confraternitas S. Nicolai Tolentinatis, qui multorum miraculorum patratione illarum gentium conversionem promovit" Cruesen ([1620] 1890, pp. 621–622). For further information about the early history of the evangelization of West Africa, see Brásio (1944, 1952–1953, 1958).

150 Wiltgen (1956, p. 23). Fetu [Effutu] and Komenda are presently Traditional Areas on the coast of Ghana some few miles East of Ahanta.

151 As to the area of the ancient coast of Mina, see Debrunner (1959, pp. 19 ff.); Field (1937, pp. 154 ff.); Grottanelli (1978, pp. 203–237); Rattray (1927, pp. 27 ff.).

152 Kluckhohn (1944).

153 See Kino (1919). See also Ferrari (1961); Lockwood (1934).

154 "Witches are associated with death and the dead. They are likewise closely associated with incest. […] Witches' Sabbath. Witches as were-animals meet at night to plan concerted action against victims, to initiate new members, to have intercourse with dead women, to practice cannibalism, to kill victims at a distance by ritualized practices" (Kluckhohn 1944, pp. 25, 27).

155 See Franciscans (1910) and Kluckhohn (1944, p. 28). The Franciscan Fathers were sent to replace the Jesuits after the suppression of the Company of Jesus at the end of the eighteenth century.

156 For the Indo-Tibetan area, see Eliade (1975, p. 151). For Melanesia and Oceania, see Patterson (1974, 1975); Róheim (1948, 1950); Steadman (1975); Strathern (1982). For a historical insight on similarities in the cannibalistic behavior of witches and shamans, see Wilby (2013, pp. 25 ff.). For just a glance to the various forms of contemporary witchcraft and their analogies in different parts of the world, see, among many others, Bernault and Tonda eds. (2000); Bond and Ciekawy eds. (2001); *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* (2008); Comaroff and Comaroff eds. (1993); Geschiere (1997, 2013); Moore and Sanders eds. (2001); Schram (2010); Stewart and Strathern (2004).

157 See for example: Barker ed. (1990); Beidelman (1982).

158 Not to mention the *reducciones* of the Jesuit missions in the Spanish and Portuguese Americas.

159 The document was posted on August 28, 2014, and I received it from one of my Facebook friends from Ghana – a 20-year-old boy – on August 31.

160 It may be of interest to report the reactions of some of the members of the group as they appeared on the Facebook page of the group (https://www.facebook.com/groups/101197996605556/permalink/736361286422554/) which I consulted the 31 August 2014: Mariam Holy: GOD plssssss help nd guide me Aaaaaaaaaaaamen 29 August 10:55pm. Asiedu Kwabena Ale: Lord protect us 29 August 11:00pm. Vera Etornam Katorgeh: lord guide, protect, nd have mercy us amen 30 August 3:18pm (note the peculiar orthography used by youths in Facebook).

161 Contemporary witnesses of such an ecclesiastic jurisdiction are the works of two Protestant missionaries, the Anglican Geoffrey Parrinder, who wrote a comparison between European and African witchcraft, though rather incomplete and theoretically obsolete (Parrinder 1958); and the Rev. Hans Werner Debrunner of the Basel Mission, who wrote a book about witchcraft in Ghana (Debrunner 1959).

References

ATT	Arquivo da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon
BAV	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome, Vatican City
BCC	Biblioteca Comunale Centrale, Milano
BEU	Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, Modena
BG	Biblioteca Guarnacci, Volterra
BL	British Library, London
BNM	Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice
BML	Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence
BNCF	Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence
BNCVE	Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale “Vittorio Emanuele II”, Rome
BNF	Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
BNP	Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Lisbon
LC	Library of Congress, Washington DC
RICC	Biblioteca Riccardiana, Florence

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2 Witchcraft, medicine and British colonial rule

Anthropological analysis of colonial documents in the Gold Coast

Elisa Vasconi

Ghana was the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa, after achieving independence in 1957, to launch a process of recognition of traditional medicine. Local therapeutic resources were identified by Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, and used as a political tool for nation building, the construction of national identity and the exemplification of the "true African culture". The first outcome of this process led to the establishment of the *Ghana Psychic and Traditional Healers Association* (GHPTHA) in 1960,[1] which is still considered one of the most important associations at the national level. Why did Nkrumah identify native therapeutic resources as a political instrument, a shared symbol and a cross-cultural element for the new citizens of the state of Ghana? There were many elements, which led to the legitimization of traditional medicine in the postcolony[2] – one primary factor was a direct response to the tendency of European colonial administrations to marginalize local therapeutic knowledge. The National Archives of Ghana[3] contain numerous letters, comments, messages and statements from British officials that expressed a strong skepticism about the efficacy of traditional remedies. Such documents defined spiritual practices and local therapeutic cults – not only as magical and superstitious but, sometimes, also as maleficent acts. Moreover, the British colonial administration put numerous local cults at the margins of the legal system.

Between 1912 and 1957, the British issued several antiwitchcraft acts in the ruled territories, using vague yet inclusive language to target variegated practices associated with the supernatural. Through an anthropological analysis of such historical documents, this chapter will examine the ways in which the British colonial administration defined witchcraft and categorically molded it into a 'maleficent' phenomenon. The following pages will focus, in particular, on political and legislative colonial language, which used the terms 'witchcraft', 'occult' and 'supernatural' interchangeably, compressing disparate, strongly heterogeneous cultural phenomena.

When exactly did the British administration become interested in witchcraft? And, above all, why did it attribute such importance to its practices? After examining the factors that led the British to intervene politically in the tradition, this chapter will address the acts promoted in various colonies, and focus on the language of legislative bodies, the absence of precise definitions and the use of vague linguistic formulas that gave birth to a new legal subject. It will place particular attention on the measure issued in 1930 in the Gold Coast. The analysis of this case reveals how practices, policies and colonial discourses mixed and entangled witchcraft with therapeutic and religious cults by treating all three as a single phenomenon.

Therefore, archive materials hereby examined will lead us to interpret witchcraft as a tool of the colonial government, which was consolidated and through which the administration not only criminalized the native traditions but promoted a new health policy as well. The British perceived the banning of local cults as a necessary action in the process of civilization – the work of colonization – which saw, in parallel with acts against witchcraft, the imposition of a new territorial management, new standards and new perceptions for hygiene, health and disease. Thus, colonial health policy and antiwitchcraft decrees will be, in this work, placed alongside and defined as devices of colonial power suitable to the establishment of the health system in the ruled territories.

The colonial encounter

Colonization[4] imposed Western medicine in African territories, launching institutionalization and bureaucratization processes, developing surveillance and control techniques, and defining the health of the population as a scientific subject. Political authorities began to take on the responsibility for public health, then perceived as an issue for the socio-political organization. Hence, the Western health care model,[5] with its empirical power and effectiveness, which went hand-in-hand with the administrative and military institutions, was imposed as a hegemonic system.

The imposition of new health policies led to the repression of some local cults. For this reason, some anthropological interpretations described these colonial relationships as unidirectional interactions: they identified the precolonial African societies as societies in balance and colonialism as the first and only carrier of conflicts and change, in which the Western world ruled and only the indigenous world incorporated new models.[6] However, the colony is hereby interpreted as "the place of social change and political re-composition"[7] and not simply as a space of passive reception of biomedicine that is imposed upon it.[8] Moreover, the colonial encounter led to the creation of numerous new religious, therapeutic and possession cults and to the increase of ordeals and witchcraft accusations.[9] The interaction between European medicine and local knowledge led the latter to transform its techniques and its own imagination, to incorporate elements belonging to biomedical models and to lay out strategies of appropriation and translation, especially evident in the symbolic changes of the rhetorical metamorphosis of traditional medicine.[10] Power relations in the field of therapies[11] and hegemonic relations among Europeans and Africans led the latter to put in place strategies of redefinition, negotiation and recombination of local cults and rituals.[12]

The establishment of the health care system instigated such local ferment that the British government decided to take political action. Colonizers had to deal with a world characterized by an increase of ordeals, ritual deaths and witchcraft accusations, which were a strong element of concern to the British authorities. These native phenomena were handled by local authorities and Native Tribunals, as in the case of the Gold Coast. The British were here completely kept out of their management. The native administration of these phenomena led British officials to impose control over the practices related to the occult, which were interpreted as potential

disruptive and subversive activities of the colonial order. In 1938, Lord Hailey described witchcraft as " 'the outstanding problem of the lawgiver in Africa', and recommended that existing legislation be reviewed".[13]

However, among the reasons that led the British to adopt antiwitchcraft measures was also the identification of witchcraft as a good target for the struggle for colonial civilization. With its bizarre beliefs and alleged abhorrent and awful practices, witchcraft provided the opportunity to confirm the European vision of Africans as primitive people dominated by superstition and fear of evil.[14] The colonial officials, despite being obviously fascinated and sometimes able to use indigenous ritual techniques as a means of political control over the ruled territories, considered witchcraft as a manifestation of the cultural backwardness of the continent and of the European intellectual, technological and moral superiority.[15] Hailey pointed out that it was not antiwitchcraft law itself that was at issue but the extent to which administrations were determined to impress their own conceptions on behavior on Africa.[16]

In the twentieth century, the political relevance obtained by occult and witchcraft led also to a significant change in the academic world. Scholars began to focus on the various spheres in which the world of magic – up until then indistinct – started to be observed. Until the 1930s, anthropologists discussed magic as a fundamental characteristic of an infantile stage of evolution of the human mind.[17] At a time when knowledge of Africa was still lacking, magic drew the attention of scholars who did not isolate the occult beliefs and did not perceived them as a specific topic of analysis. For this reason, anthropologists until then did not have any particular interest in witchcraft, unlike the religious missions and, above all, the colonial administrations that directly dealt with the daily reality of the local communities.[18] Nevertheless, the evolutionist theory, with its peculiar interpretation of magic, was replaced by functionalism that defined witchcraft as one of the mechanisms of social order. The intellectual turning point took place with the publication of *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* in 1937, by Edward E. Evans-Pritchard. In a previous article, this author had already asserted that cultures had been respected with their integrity and studied without denigrating any comparison between science and magic.[19] But how did intellectual reflection and administrative colonial needs adjust to the political

intervention on witchcraft? And how were local phenomena interpreted and banned?

Antiwitchcraft laws: The Gold Coast and the new courts

The acts issued by the British administration[20] drew inspiration from the policies of the mother country, and, above all, by the famous antiwitchcraft law approved in 1736. The latter sanctioned in Britain the end of the witch-hunt and criminalized witch-finding[21] practices. Political authority was entitled to prosecute not only those who claimed to know how to act with occult means but also those who spread the fear of witchcraft. Such an act replaced the previous legislation of the sixteenth century, which instead provided the possibility of invisible crimes against people and property.[22] However, the colonial antiwitchcraft acts were influenced by the *Encyclopaedia of Laws of England* – a collection of edicts and regulations enacted in Great Britain.[23] It was a compendium of laws partially disseminated in the African territories. In the National Archives of Ghana, there is an extract of this volume containing a particular description of witchcraft, characterized by language on which the subsequent colonial measures were based.

> Witchcraft may be taken to include any claim of a power to produce effects by supernatural causes. By whatever name alleged power might be called in any particular case, whether witchcraft, conjuration, sorcery, incantation, divination, or magic, the legal consequences attaching to its supposed exercise were usually the same. […] Sorcery is a convenient crime to fix upon those who had no other. […] In the present state of the law pretended supernatural powers may be such as to bring those professing them under the criminal law, or to avoid an alienation of property caused in their belief in their existence. The Act 1736 enacted that any person pretending to use witchcraft, tell fortunes, or discover stolen goods by skill in any occult or crafty science was to be imprisoned for a year […]. By the Vagrancy Act, 1824, any person

> pretending or professing to tell fortunes, or using any subtle craft, means, or device, to impose on any of His Majesty's subjects, is to be deemed a rogue and vagabond. A false pretence of witchcraft is also indictable under the Larceny Act, 1861.[24]

It is clear here that witchcraft was associated with supernatural knowledge and powers. Extremely heterogeneous phenomena were included and overlapped in a macro-category. Such attitude revived, later on, in colonial territories through the promulgation of antiwitchcraft measures.

In regard to colonial order on witchcraft, George Orde Brown wrote one of the most interesting scientific papers, *Witchcraft and British Colonial Law*, published in 1935. The author proposed an overview of the British colonial territories and observed how they adopted similar regulations and measures, with the purpose of criminalizing occult practices. He defined these acts as instrumental laws to ban local phenomena, religious and therapeutic cults, and everything related to the supernatural and magic. Although such laws were adopted in different years and carried some differences within the colonies, the antiwitchcraft laws shared important elements. In 1912, a first decree was issued in the Protectorate of Uganda, which outlawed everything that was attributable to the categories of healing, magic, witchcraft and possession. In 1914, one of the most severe measures against occult powers was approved in Northern Rhodesia. The Kenya Witchcraft Ordinance, which punished those who held supernatural powers, was first enacted in 1909, amended in 1918, then redrafted and reissued in 1925. In Nigeria in 1928, an act that directly addressed the criminalization of ordeals was approved, while in Tanganyika a decree was issued without direct references to witch doctors, but which, however, made the use of occult powers illegal.[25] The last antiwitchcraft law was issued in 1957 in the Protectorate of Uganda, where, for the first time, a distinction, though still vague, between witchcraft and therapeutic practices seemed to emerge.

As for the Gold Coast, the first measure against witchcraft (the Order in Council no. 28, included within the criminal code of the colony), was approved on December 19, 1930. This act abolished the Native Tribunals and attributed the judicial power exclusively to the courts specifically established by the British Administration. In addition, it banned the practice

of witch or wizard finding, forbidding witchcraft accusations and criminalizing the accusers.

> The practice of witch or wizard finding and any ceremony connected therewith shall be prohibited and any person taking part or instigating any person to take part in any such ceremony shall be liable to a fine not exceeding twenty five pounds.[26]

Natasha Gray affirms that this law contributed significantly to the transformation of the practice of witch-cleansing in the Gold Coast.[27] The legislation was the result of a long series of negotiations among African leaders, missionaries and colonizers. Witchcraft gradually assumed various characteristics and connotations and was associated with a number of activities of spiritual nature of the so-called indigenous medicines – even if autochthonous medical resources were characterized by peculiar and different perceptions of health and disease, healing, efficacy and therapeutic treatment.

Besides, the peculiarity of this legislative body was the vagueness of terminology and concepts. The antiwitchcraft act's language defined different local practices and cults with the same vague terms. Thus, heterogeneous local phenomena were managed by colonial rule as a unique juridical subject. Nancy Rose Hunt, writing on reproduction in Congo, traced the development of the 'colonial lexicon' and examined the shifting and the negotiations of vocabularies and vernaculars towards state interventions during the twentieth century.[28] She observed how the colonial lexicon offered "a vocabulary list open to abstract, bodily, and spiritual [phenomena], words that were "alive as speech in a context of language and colonial power, a context of complex hierarchies and differential translations".[29]

Accordingly, this chapter attends to the spread of such overlapping and terminology confusion imposed by the colonial acts, which also characterizes many other colonial documents kept within the National Archives of Ghana. In some folders, comments and letters are retained in which officials discussed the legality of some local phenomena, using terms such as *witch-doctor, witchcraft, fetish priest, fetish dance, fetish religion, occult* and *supernatural*, often interpreting them as synonyms. Two

particularly explanatory cases of the construction of witchcraft as a macro-category and of a conceptual and lexical uniformity will be hereby examined. The folder entitled *Witch-doctor at Suhum* contains acts relating to a case of witchcraft raised by the Provincial Commissioner's Office of Koforidua in the Eastern Province.[30] Although these documents were specifically related to witchcraft, as the title evokes, they discuss the banning of a witch doctor, always referring to him using the term *fetish*. In the letters written on June 4 and October 31, 1930, the Provincial Commissioner informed the Colonial Secretary of Victoriaborg (Accra) about the status of persecution of the *Suhum Fetish* by the police.[31] In the folder was also a letter from the acting head of the Roman Catholic Mission on the Gold Coast, sent on March 24, 1930, to the colonial secretary in Accra, in which the undifferentiated use of some words and the relationship among colonizers, missionaries and local authorities are particularly evident.

> In my duty as Acting Head of the Roman Catholic mission on the Gold Coast to report to Your Honour the unjust and revolting dealings of a certain fetish priest, a witch doctor who is enjoying great popularity since several months at Suhum, near Nsawami, in the Aim District. […] The fetish Suhum has become famous all along the Coast for his professional success and it is now a quite common practice of the Native Tribunals here to refer witchcraft cases and other matters of the same nature […].[32]

The letter concludes with a clear condemnation of witchcraft and supernatural practices – sometimes defined by the word *fetish* – interpreted not only as false but also as dangerous to public order. Moreover, missionaries were the first to inaugurate a *lingua franca* through which later on the hierarchical relation between the colonized and the colonizers was carried out.[33]

The second example considers a series of documents filed under the title *Sogbo Fetish* in which is discussed the prohibition of the *Sogbo Fetish Religion* in Keta, in the Eastern Province.[34] In the petition ("The petition to his Excellency the Governor from John G. Thomas Cole and others") sent on March 2, 1938, by the Provincial Commissioner's Office, Koforidua, to

the colonial secretary, Victoriaborg, Accra, a particular description of this religious cult emerges – where witches, fetish priests, occult and supernatural are constantly overlapping.

> We have the honour to submit the attached petition regarding the prohibition of the Sogbo Fetish Religion […] the D.C. Keta affirmed the functions of the fetishes in questions were connected with witch-finding […]. The Sogbo Fetish included witch-finding in its activity […]. It is dangerous because of witchcraft and juju.

Therefore, the colonial vocabulary was not only characterized by vagueness, with words used synonymously and a lack of precise definitions, but also by the spread of new terms, such as *fetish*. It is an English word of Portuguese origin, introduced within African territories during the colonial era, associated with different phenomena (such as dances, religion, witch doctors and healers) but instrumental to the colonial language to contain the complexity of local phenomena. The term, still in use, seems to have maintained the same polysemic quality in the postcolony: in the language of politics, media and, sometimes, of local communities, the expression *fetish priest* is used to translate different categories of traditional healers into the English language.

Local leaders were never consulted for the drawing up of the antiwitchcraft acts, as their management was completely in the hands of Europeans. However, witchcraft posed special difficulties to the British. The Western legal systems were based on the concept of proof, and witchcraft could not be proven. Waller noted that colonial rule failed to establish a reasonable means of proof, and observed that

> Government had to strike in two different directions, against both witches and those who killed them […]. The killing of suspected witches was not only "repugnant to [colonial] justice or morality" but also a challenge to the monopoly of force on which colonial rule rested. […] However while it was not difficult to prosecute and convict witch killers under the Penal Code, it was far more so to secure convictions for witchcraft under the Ordinance.[35]

Therefore, such prohibition had the effect of convincing many Africans of the incoherence and the inability of Europeans to understand the conditions of their lives, and especially the strange tendency of the colonizers, through such measures, to protect the operators of evil (witches and sorcerers) at the expense of the victims.[36] For this reason, it is interesting to underline that – in contrast to the optimistic belief of the early settlers imbued with scientism and positivism still linked to the evolutionary view – the various forms of practices related to the occult did not completely disappear under the influence of the European civilizing actions but attracted some of the settlers, who were fascinated by the charm of these practices, some of whom opportunistically evaluated the positive function in relation to the need to maintain order and social control in colonial territories.[37]

The antiwitchcraft decrees were an instrument of criminalization of occult practices but also of marginalization of local therapeutic knowledge.[38] As Schirripa and Vulpiani observed, the colonial refusal towards the indigenous medical resources arose not only from the ethnocentric conviction of the ineffectiveness and the irrationality of these cults, but also from the necessity to control traditional healers.[39] These covered both a therapeutic-religious and political role. European officials viewed healers as potential political leaders. In the Gold Coast, there were numerous examples of repression of traditional cults,[40] always justified by the desire to suppress the activity of witch-finding.[41] The British defended this repression – they claimed that, otherwise, many innocents would have been punished or placed at the edge of their communities as a result of unjust accusations. However, the repression was only applied in respect to particular cults that acquired a certain prestige. This factor highlighted how the British administration was aware of the potential political significance of healers and priests.[42]

This linguistic and ideological overlap between witchcraft and therapeutic cults emerges also from the cataloging of documents within the National Archives, which reveal a particular definition of traditional medicine. This category is exclusively referred to in documents concerning herbal products and studies on local pharmacopeia. Some archival materials demonize the supernatural on the one hand and praise the ‘traditional medicine’ intended as herbalist practice on the other. This dichotomy and linguistic imposition are evident in the British studies on local

pharmacopeia. A colonial official, Arnold Hodson, clearly expresses this in a letter sent to the MP Malcolm Macdonald.

> On March 1939, Lord Hailey proposed "An African Survey" regarding the study of native medicines, to inform that the potential value of the information which might be derived from a careful analysis of the herbs used by the more reputable African practitioners has long been recognised in the Colony.[43]

Many documents show a remarkable inconsistency of herbal remedies with the British Pharmacopoeia imposed in colonial territories. They refer to a perception and definition of safety, quality and hygiene far from those of the Africans. Some letters concern the distribution of specific drugs and the creation of an institution devoted to the management of products different from the 'traditional' ones,[44] which are often referred to as 'dangerous'. Lastly, some specific documents, such as the Druggist's Licence of 1931–1939 and the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance of 1938, regulated the concession of license for the sale, import and export of medical products, among which some local herbs were included.[45]

The analysis of these historical documents shows how the administrative knowledge about witchcraft and medical practices circulated in a standardized language among administrators across colonial territories. We can remark as well how the construction of colonial categories and language (criminalization of witchcraft, marginalization of therapeutic cults and spread of a new native medicine definition) were relevant tools of the colonial policy. Nevertheless, they have to be interpreted also as important instruments related to the imposition of a new health policy and the establishment of public health within ruled territories.

The health care system: Public health and segregationist politics

Missionaries, since their sixteenth century settling in Africa, introduced the earliest biomedical treatments.[46] Missionary medical assistance notwithstanding, the colonial medicine inaugurated the organization of

brand new knowledge, the imposition of orthodox paradigms and the dissemination of the political administration of health and disease. Through the establishment of the colony, biomedicine became a tool of domination,[47] able to impose a new management of bodies and territories, new classifications between what was normal and pathological, between the civilized-healthy white and the sick-rebellious black,[48] who lacked in moral attitude and was less inclined to hygienic forms.[49]

The systematic introduction of biomedicine took place between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the hostile territory, poor sanitary conditions and limited epidemiological knowledge diverted English medical personnel from spending prolonged periods in the ruled territories.[50] However, the tragic fame of the colonies and the need to improve sanitary and health conditions for the white people living in the African colonies led to a change of route. The European interest in the tropical epidemics grew,[51] the need for specialist training for medical staff began to spread among the British authorities,[52] and the first schools of tropical medicine were set up in Great Britain.[53] The colonial context changed primarily through the imposition of a new health policy strongly inspired by the motherland and the economic and geopolitical transformations.[54] Following the devastating epidemics that hindered the entire European continent in 1831, Great Britain imposed a revolutionary concept: prevention related to appropriate urban hygiene.[55] The second half of the nineteenth century marked the debut of a conceptual revolution in the history of science, a turn toward a theory that reinforced the preventive and hygienist doctrine. In 1864, Pasteur demonstrated the presence of germs in the atmosphere, ushering in a different substantive interpretation of disease and contagion. He inaugurated a new scientific paradigm, different from the previous miasmatic medicine, according to which the fumes and stench were the key elements of the diagnostic analysis.[56] The "bacteriological turning point" led the colonial administrations to impose medical control on the territories and bodies and to draw a precise map of the villages.[57] The germ theory focused the medical and biological gaze on the individual, on the pathology and behavior of specific micro-organisms.[58] Hygiene was defined as the basis of civilization, related to the progress and the civilizing process of Africa; it

became central in the colonial ideological discourses on the justification of colonization and segregation of Europeans.

From the late nineteenth century, the first hospitals began to be set up in the colonized territories. They were the expressions of the new medical discipline and representatives of a new health science.[59] The administration began to numerically examine births, deaths, displacement of populations, and to acquire quantitative information both on the natives and on the Europeans living in the colonies.[60] A new regulation of territories, a new perception of hygiene, and the sanitary preventive measures began to spread. All these factors led to the implementation of segregation policy in the British colonies that established a real "health apartheid".[61] The location of the disease moved from the stench produced from the unhealthy environment to the bodies: the bodies of blacks saturated with plasmodia and germs, dangerous as good reservoirs for mosquitoes. Preventive medicine distanced the blacks from the whites, moved the latter in areas far from the natives, in new neighborhoods built to reduce contagion and ensure hygienically adequate places.[62] If the mosquitoes and the germs were vectors, the body of the black person was the cause of the disease. It represented the place in which easily transmittable diseases lurked, and the appearance of the symptoms was not only a sign of physical and biological disorder but of moral and social type. Domesticating bodies, controlling activities and bodily functions such as eating, sleeping, working, defecating, were the primary goals in the fight against the spread of diseases.[63]

It is possible to find all of this information in the historical reconstruction of the Gold Coast health system. In 1878, in addition to the inauguration of the first civilian hospital in Accra, the first law to adjust the layout of the urban hygienic-sanitary system was issued.[64] The well-being and the improvement of the Europeans' living conditions represented the primary objectives of the laws. In 1883, the *Sanitary Bye-Laws under the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance* was enacted; through it, the management and application of new rules of hygiene were passed directly to local chiefs. The latter were entrusted with the task of applying the 11 points that characterized the legislation, regarding a new space management, sanitary regulations, and a new discipline of the territories and bodies.

1. The Chief or headman shall select sites in the vicinity of his village for latrines and rubbish heaps which sites shall not be less than 100 yards from house or water supply: he shall cause the ground in the vicinity of the latrines to be kept clean and in good order; 2. Any person using other site than that appointed by the Chief or headman shall be guilty of committing a nuisance and be liable to a fine to exceeding; 3. Any inhabitant of the village who willfully disobeys the order of the Chief or headman with regard to: (i) cleaning the vicinity of his house, (ii) filling up of unused water holes and borrows pits, (iii) clearing bush (iv) digging latrines and (v) demolishing any ruined house of which he is the owner when the order of the Chief is supported by the written certificate of a District Commissioner, Medical Officer or Foreman of Works shall be liable to a fine not exceeding; 4. The Chief or headman shall select a site for a cemetery, which site shall not be less than 100 yards from any house or water supply and fence it in […]; 5. The Chief or headman shall at once report to the District Commissioner the occurrence of any infectious disease in his town or village; 6. The occupier of any house of where a case of infectious disease shall occur or be suspected to have occurred shall report the matter at once to the Chief or headman […]; 7. Every inhabitant of a town or village concerned shall be responsible to a Chief or headman of such town or village for carrying out all measures ordered by the District Commissioners or Medical Officers for the prevention or against the spread of infectious diseases, such orders may be in respect of (i) isolation of patients (ii) construction of isolation huts (iii) disinfection of houses (iv) evacuation of houses (v) evacuation of town areas; 8. No person shall erect any building in any town or village without the permit of the Chief or headman […]; 9. The Chief or headman of any town or village where pigs or cattle are kept shall have kraals or pens erected outside the town or village wherein such pigs and cattle may be penned […]; 10. The owner of any horse, mule, donkey, cattle, swine, sheep, goat, cat dog, or other domestic animal suffering from or suspected to be suffering from any infectious disease shall at once destroy the same

> or report the matter to the Chief or headman. […]; 11. The Chief or headman shall select where necessary sites for wells or water holes and see that they are sufficiently far from the town or village and that the ground around them is kept clean and the well protected from surface water.[65]

The Sanitary Bye-Laws were a series of innovative guidelines, enacted simultaneously with the policy of Europeans' residential segregation.[66] In 1893, the colonial government moved Europeans to new isolated neighborhoods,[67] special areas far from the city, which had become too crowded with Africans who migrated to urban centers. The construction of neighborhoods partially depended on the difficulties in imposing sanitary standards all over the ruled territory, and in part by the negative perception of the indigenous people. "The natives of this region are *naturally* dirty"; these were the words used by Dr. J. D. Reid and shared by the majority of the British population,[68] whose welfare was guaranteed through the isolation and construction of areas closed to the locals.[69] The Gold Coast was the first colonial territory to establish a similar health policy, which later on was extended to the other British colonies.

The history of the colonial health care system could seem disconnected from the topic of witchcraft. However, the spread of European medicine was connected with the increasing of occult practices. After all, the Europeans' isolation and the imposition of biomedical paradigms were related to the negative perception of local cults. Orthodox medicine was imposed in parallel to the marginalization of local therapeutic practices and the banning of witchcraft. Both actions were the expressions of the most relevant colonial narratives, practices and laws that inaugurated the new health policy.

The colonial governance: Between witchcraft and public health

The anthropological analysis of the antiwitchcraft measures and archive documents leads to the attention on the interconnections between culture,

supernatural, health, disease, crime, law and state.[70] The criminalization of witchcraft and the implementation of a new health policy were the expressions of the European civilizing work and of the colonial governance: they were the central arena of state-formation as the achievement of the goals of governance. Writing on witchcraft in colonial Kenya, Katherine Luongo affirmed: "the colonial administration endeavored through the development of a power-knowledge complex rooted in anthropology and via the elaboration of law, to extend its coercive capacities over cultural and juridical forms".[71]

Thus, the development of the colonial state is relevant for witchcraft studies and for the historical and medical-anthropological analysis of the health care system. Moreover, the attention on the colonial vocabulary allows considering the 'reality' of these phenomena and reflecting on the recent return of witchcraft accusations in Africa. Nowadays, in Sub-Saharan countries there seems to be an increase of witchcraft accusations, witch hunts and ritual sacrifices – a growth partially caused by the diffusion of mass media and film production that enhance the popularity of these phenomena.[72] John and Jean Comaroff observed how present witchcraft practices and economies of occult have to be examined related to Satanism, religious movements, child sacrifices and neopaganism, all of which are expressions of the relevant role of esoteric practices within the contemporary society.[73]

The British *indirect rule* imposed the control on the colonies through local institutions and traditional rule and was characterized by a constant negotiation among European interests with the local ones. Nevertheless, witchcraft and biomedicine were the key elements of British hegemony through which new forms of imperial power were developed. Besides drawing a line between legal and illegal local practices, antiwitchcraft measures and orthodox medicine consolidated the establishment of the health care system. In fact, the acts are hereby interpreted as part of the same colonial health policy because they outlawed local cults and contributed to the definition of a native medicine as an exclusively herbal resource. These actions took place through the establishment of a new juridical subject and especially by the spreading of a vague lexicon,[74] useful to contain the complexity of local phenomena. The occult, as well as the supernatural, became terms that included different attitudes, local activities

otherwise hardly manageable and definable. Witchcraft brings, therefore, a new element to the history of the British Empire in Africa and points out a progressive synergy between colonial administration and anthropology on witchcraft, analyzing how administrators and scholars came to consider it as a problem of colonial governmentality.[75]

However, the historical perspective[76] adopted here also allows the reflection on current interpretations of witchcraft, still today defined as a form of violence. As Luongo noted, it is not only an anthropological curiosity but a source of violent disorder, practically and popularly recognized.[77] The historical survey of colonial language, measures, repression of therapeutic cults and health policy is a relevant interpretation key for medical-anthropological and witchcraft studies. The diachronic view is essential also for the analysis of current occult phenomena, contemporary terminologies and postcolonial recognition of traditional medicine, often slowed by the increase of witchcraft accusations. The legitimization of local medical resources in Sub-Saharan Africa[78] is often characterized by the integration of their empirical aspects. The aim of political authorities is to guarantee greater effectiveness of traditional medicine by ensuring the sole development of herbal products and their marketing, through the imposition of biomedical paradigms and a number of patents to sanction the sale of herbs meant as drugs. Even the law for the recognition of traditional medicine approved in Ghana in the year 2000 supports the inclusion of only herbal remedies. Moreover, it features a vague language without any differentiation among categories of healers and the different autochthonous therapeutic knowledge and practices. In Uganda, for example, the law for the integration of local medicines, submitted in 2000, is still prevented by the parliament due to the overlap and confusion among traditional medicine, witchcraft and occult. In Ugandan political and media debates, traditional therapeutic practices are often related to the proliferation of witchcraft accusations and child sacrifices, which have not only shocked the public opinion but increasingly exacerbate the institutional suspect about traditional healers. Newspapers, parliamentary statements and police reports[79] accuse some healers of ritual crimes, referring to them with the words *witch doctors*, *medicine men, fetish priest* or *spiritualists*. The undifferentiated use of these terms implies a superimposition among the medical treatments and the occult practices: a

conceptual blend also marked in the *Witchcraft Act*, issued in 1957 and still inserted within the *Criminal Law and Procedures of the Constitution* of the independent country. The previous examples underline that the historical perspective does not highlight the fact that problems faced during post-independency are the same as those of colonialism but emphasizes how the colonial encounter gave birth to a language and categories that still today affect the postcolony.

Since the early 1990s, witchcraft studies are mainly characterized by a political analysis and the connection of witchcraft with global economic trends.[80] A different analytic perspective, more inspired by an anthropological history of the colonial governance, like the one adopted here, would allow a deeper insight in the colonial administrators' positioning toward the witchcraft conundrum. It would raise as well a better attention to the relation between traditional and orthodox medicine and favor a wider overview for the analysis of the current reality of witchcraft. The diachronic reconstruction can throw more light on the links between past and present and stimulate, as Caprara noted, the anthropological analysis to innovative directions and observation of new practices and original concepts.[81] Hence, as Comaroff questioned: would it be possible to carry out the anthropological research without the historical perspective?[82] In a later work, John and Jean Comaroff noted that colonialism gave way to postcoloniality, observing that custom is not dying in post-colonies and argued how neoliberal nation-states dialog with cultural diversity and customary authority.[83] In particular, they examined the antinomy between law and culture, culture and crime in South Africa, discussing how nowadays witchcraft cases are treated and reduced as a *dangerous* and *cultural* commodity.[84] Indeed, witchcraft accusations and terminological confusions persist into the present, and many African judicial systems – as the cases of Kenya, Uganda and Cameroon show – continue to rely on the antiwitchcraft acts, virtually unchanged in language and implementation from the colonial era to present.

Notes

1 The primary objectives of the GHPTHA are: promoting the study of herbal knowledge and efficacy of traditional remedies in Ghana and in Africa for subsequent use in public health and

other health programs; establishing a national institute for research on traditional medicine; and setting up clinics for traditional treatment. The idea was to complement orthodox cures of common diseases with traditional treatments and offer patients options for their healing (Schirripa 2005, p. 130).

2 For an in-depth analysis of the path of legitimacy of traditional medicine in Ghana, see Schirripa (1998, 2005); Vasconi and Owoahene-Acheampong (2010).

3 Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD).

4 Several scholars emphasized the coercion and control of the colonies. Colonization was defined by Frantz Fanon as a "systematized denial of the other" (Fanon 1965, p. 184) and was interpreted by postcolonial studies as the "dark and opaque kingdom of unconditional and intrinsic power, such as intensive monitoring" (Mbembe 2000), "taming of the natives" (Mudimbe 1988), "repression of the wonderful indigenous" and "economy of coercion" (Mbembe 1997, p. 102).

5 The health care system can be defined as the interrelationship between institutions – international, national and local, political-financial-health, public and private – policies, reforms, programs, narratives structured and issued by them, therapeutic facilities (public and private) managed and controlled by government agencies, health care staff (biomedical and traditional) and local actors; it can be perceived as a political-institutional management of health and disease, body and drugs, and plurality of medical resources in a given society at a given historical period (Vasconi 2012).

6 Schirripa (2005, pp. 40–41).

7 Bayart (1993, p. 304).

8 Scott (2005, pp. 25–27) described the colonial period as a form of power that put in place a transformation and elaboration of conditions and forms of life, a reorganization that did not claim a total break with the past.

9 For an in-depth analysis of strategies of appropriation and recombination of local cults, see, for example, Peel (2003), on Christianity and formation of Yoruba culture in Nigeria; White (2000) on 'vampire' stories and new use of blood in colonial East and Central Africa; Argenti (1998) and Beneduce (2010) on the birth of new rituals, dances and cults in colonial Cameroon; Caprara (2001) on the encounter between European and local medicine and the birth of new medical treatments; Schirripa (2000) on ordeals and witchcraft accusations in the Gold Coast; Parker (2004) on witchcraft, antiwitchcraft and innovation in the Akan forest region of Asante and the Gold Coast; Brivio (2011) on the widespread presence of anti-witchcraft cults and voodoo on the Gold Coast and Benin.

10 Janzen investigated, for example, the transformation of traditional medicine in Congo, focusing on mutations of ideologies, transformation of taxonomies and nosological classifications, organizational changes of therapies and various forms of legitimacy, correlated to the impact of historical events that mixed up with the strategic aspects and objectives of therapeutic cults. The author clearly underlined how transformations and redefinitions of the cults of affliction highlighted such dynamics in an exemplary manner (Janzen 1992).

11 Schirripa defined the field of therapies (Schirripa 2005, 2010) as a complex field of forces, recalling the definition of Bourdieu (1971, [1994]), in which different actors use multiple strategies and occupy dominant and dominated positions, negotiated case by case. It is a dynamic system that depends at any time on power relations, negotiations and power struggles, functional in transforming and retaining positions and roles within it: "power relations that reflect wider social relations, hegemonic forms and counter-hegemonic strategies" (Schirripa 2005, p. 28).

12 Beneduce (2010).

13 Waller (2003, p. 2).

14 Bellagamba (2008).

15 Alice Bellagamba identified the struggle against the indigenous superstition as a fundamental element in the dialectic relation between colonized and colonizer: it was an ideological position recorded in the law of British colonies (Bellagamba 2008, p. 45).
16 Waller (2003, p. 28).
17 See Frazer (1911). In *Le surnaturel et la nature dans la mentalité primitive* (1931), Lévy-Bruhl analyzed ethnographic reports of missionaries, travelers and scholars published between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, which overlapped witchcraft and black magic.
18 Missionaries and officials working in the territories annexed to the European influence proved themselves as compilers of detailed ethnographic collections in which bizarre and disturbing rituals and beliefs were described.
19 Evans-Pritchard (1935).
20 Antiwitchcraft laws marked all British colonies in Africa (see Davis 1999).
21 Witch-finding means the set of the divining actions of healers for the unmasking of witches.
22 Bellagamba (2008, p. 45).
23 The *Encyclopaedia of the Laws of England* was published in 1907, and its publication arose from an idea of Stanley Shaw Bond, editor of Butterworths.
24 Extract of *Encyclopaedia of the Laws of England* (1907, PRAAD, Accra, ADM/11/1).
25 For other details about antiwitchcraft measures in Africa, see Abrahams (1994) on Tanzania; Fields (1982) and Chanock (1985) on Zambia and Malawi; Niehaus (2001) on South Africa; Waller (2003) on Kenya.
26 Order in Council no. 28, PRAAD, Accra, ADM/11/1 602.
27 Gray (2001).
28 Hunt (1999).
29 *Id.*: 12, quoted in Luongo (2011, p. 5).
30 Now known as the Eastern Region.
31 PRAAD, Accra, Witch-doctor at Suhum, N. 19/30, CSO/21/1/1.
32 Letter from the Acting Head of the Roman Catholic Mission on the Gold Coast, sent on March 24th 1930 to the Colonial Secretary in Accra. PRAAD, Accra, Witch-doctor at Suhum, N. 19/30, CSO/21/1/1
33 Comaroff (1985).
34 PRAAD, Accra, CSO 21/10/10.
35 Waller (2003, p. 5).
36 "The law treats an accusation of witchcraft as a criminal offence. To the native mind that means only that the white people, for some inscrutable reason, have decided to lend their powerful support to the sorcerer and to protect him from the punishment which his nefarious doings so richly deserve. It does not destroy the belief in sorcery: on the contrary may even serve to strengthen it: it only drives it a little further underground" (Radcliffe-Brown [1924] 1986, p. 20). See also Melland (1935).
37 Gordon Brown affirmed the concern about an occult retaliation was functional to the British administration's needs because it reinforced the subjects' obedience and guaranteed the social order (Brown and Hutt 1935). Some colonial administrators perceived African magical practices and rituals useful to catch thieves and defend properties (Bellagamba 2008, p. 76). Other officials acknowledged the political opportunity to tolerate forms of therapeutic practice associated with presumed aspects of occult manipulation, as in the case of healers, improperly defined witch doctors by the Europeans. In particular, it is even more interesting to note that some administrators even proposed to support the activities of these diviners and healers in order to reform the legislation against witchcraft accusations (see Melland 1935).
38 Philip Singer (1977) affirmed that both colonialism and the *Indirect Rule* tended to suppress local traditions, creating the conditions for a "cultural genocide" and alienation. Europeans very

seldom adopted preventive practices used by indigenous peoples. Caprara (2001, p. 55) reports the example of the seventeenth-century doctor Etienne De Flancourt Bizet, governor of Madagascar from 1648 to 1655, who enumerated a number of preventive tips to follow during travels in hot countries, which referred to indigenous practices.

39 Schirripa and Vulpiani (2000, p. 8).

40 See, for example, the following documents in PRAAD, Accra: Fetish Priest in Ashanti, ADM/11/10; Ningo Fetish, CSO 21/10/11; Ofutu Fetish suppression, ADM/11/1/950; Fetishes at Galo, ADM/11/430; Dente Fetish, ADM/11/1/751; Fetish Kofi, ADM/11/1/879; Fetish Gbanyeh, ADM/11/1/944; Akon Fetish Dance, ADM/11/1264.

41 Schirripa (2000, p. 167). The divergent practices introduced by biomedicine, the different relationship among patients, medical staff and health institutions, the different care-giving styles correlated to a divergent perceptions of the effectiveness and increasing competition, were elements gradually incorporated and domesticated by native people that led to important changes in their interpretation records. In 1931, following the marginalization of local medical resources through the measure against witchcraft, Kwesi Aaba and other traditional healers gave birth to the first association of herbalists of the Gold Coast, the *Society of African Herbalists*, denied and not recognized by the colonial administration (see Schirripa 2000).

42 For a study of the relationship between law and colonial politics in the Gold Coast, the clash between traditional and modern values, and the nature of kingship and chieftaincy in the African colonial period, see Rathbone (1993). The author analyzed the story of a ritual murder in a kingdom of Ghana, the ordeals and appeals of those who were accused of the crime, and radicalization of the black lawyers that dealt with the colonial justice system and undertook a struggle for self-government that led to the independence of the country.

43 PRAAD, Accra, Research of Native Medicine. An African Survey 1939, CSO 21/9/16.

44 See PRAAD, Accra, British Pharmacopeia, Circulars 18 August 1932, 3 October 1934, 2 November 1934, and 28 April 1945 (ADM/11/1/315).

45 The *Druggist's Licence* folder 1931–1939 (PRAAD, Accra, CSO 11/1/254) contains circulars related to witchcraft accusations and defense attempts in an epoch before the legislation that highlighted the lack of a regulation. In particular, see the case of Mr. Azzu (Druggist License Azzu 1931–1933, PRAAD, Accra, CSO 11/1/255) who, in a circular sent on 17 February 1933, put several questions to the Medical Department correlated to the lack of clarity in the acquisition of the license. Other documents describe specific allegations and suspicions against sellers of the colony. See the case of Mr. Odidja for which the Medical Department wrote an internal letter on 23 March 1931 to discuss the possible renewal of the license. See also the letter 2 March 1933 to the director of Medical and Sanitary Service raising suspicions about a Mr. Elliot. Because of such a letter, the governor issued an order on 28 June 1934 officially revoking the license. In particular, after the approval of the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance in 1935, the Commission of Policy–Criminal Investigation Department (Druggist's License 1931–1939, PRAAD, Accra, CSO 11/1/254) increased the accusations for the acquisition and sale of dangerous products. Moreover, the Memorandum of the Commission of Policy – Criminal Investigation Department, 1939 (Druggist's Licence 1931–1939, PRAAD, Accra, CSO 11/1/254) describes how to revoke the licenses.

46 Religious missions were the bearers of new languages, symbols, practices and methodologies and of a 'religious' interpretation of Western medicine. Although the need to christianize local populations highlighted the medicine as a tool for evangelization (Beidelman 1982), in many missions a particular correspondence emerged between sickness and sin that brought back the responsibility of the biological discomfort to the individual. Megan Vaughan (1991) observed that suffering and sin were inseparable in medical missionary matter. Thus, the spread of epidemics was interpreted as a punishment for amoral behavior (Kuhanen 2005; O'Manique 2004). The missionary history is actually highly correlated to the birth of the health care system,

because the missions anticipated the diffusion of biomedicine and the demonization of local therapeutic practices (see Beck 1970; Crozier 2007). See Good (1991), for a study on missionary activities in the African territories, the relationship with local populations and health-medical consequences.

47 In African territories, the majority of doctors were generally British military officers and officials. "There is no doubt that the colonial medicine constitutes … a *political space*. But this space has expanded dramatically since from colonial apparatus, where the medicine not only justifies or legitimizes the domain, but can even *replace* military action" (Beneduce 2010, p. 97).

48 The Foucaultian definition of "docility" is particularly useful and explanatory to examine the colonial interpretation. See Foucault (1976 pp. 149–151).

49 Comaroff and Comaroff (1993b); Mbembe (2000); Vaughan (1991).

50 Until the first decades of the twentieth century, colonial territories continued to be unfavorable to both the foreign and native population. European press defined the colonies as "true experience of mortality" (Curtin 1961), site of disease and danger (Vaughan 1991), "white man's grave" (Crozier 2007; Schirripa 2005). Numerous epidemiological studies pointed out how the Western presence and especially the colonial conquest led to a degeneration of the health conditions, accelerating and facilitating the spread of epidemics (see Feierman and Janzen 1992; Hughes and Hunter 1970; M'Bokolo 1986 [1983]; Patterson 1978; Schneider 2009).

51 Bado (1996); Curtin (1992).

52 Crozier (2007).

53 The *London* and *Liverpool Schools of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine* were inaugurated in 1899. They were followed by the establishment in 1904 of the *Fund for Medical Research into Tropical Diseases* – correlated to the *Medical Research Committee* – and the *Colonial Office of an Advisory Medical and Sanitary Committee for Tropical Africa* in 1909, extended in 1922 to all the British colonies (Poynton 1977, p. 197).

54 The end of the slave trade and the innovative political and economic international order transformed the African continent into a reservoir of natural resources and not just labor. Africa, during the next phase of the industrial revolution, played a functional role for Europe, becoming a relevant market for the acquisition of products and for the trading of items from the motherland (Austen 1987).

55 From the mid-nineteenth century, Britain was the first European power to impose preventive campaigns and control of territorial hygiene (Howard-Jones 1975, p. 21). Edwin Chadwick was the promoter of these policies.

56 Brand (1965, p. 38).

57 Caprara (2001).

58 Vaughan (1991, p. 33).

59 Foucault (1976); Ongaro Basaglia (1982).

60 Several bulletins (see for example the *Tropical Diseases Bulletin*, *Medical and Sanitary Reports* from the British Colonies, protectorates and Dependencies for the Years 1939–1941) attempted to summarize the health conditions of British colonies analyzing the same factors in different territories: *Vital Statistics; The European Population; Maternity and Child Welfare War; Midwives; Medical Staff; School of Hygiene; Public Health and Sanitation; The Training of Sanitary Inspectors; Port Health Work; Hospital Dispensaries; The Missionaries; Venereal Diseases and Other Disease*s.

61 Sabben-Clare *et al.* (1977).

62 In the second half of the nineteenth century, the British administration decided to move the governors of colonies in the highest areas. In 1884 the Gold Coast governor was allowed to change his residence from Accra to Aburi, Akwapim Ridge (Curtin 1992, p. 236).

63 See Schirripa (2005). Furthermore, the notions of hygiene, environment and control, spread between the nineteenth and twentieth century, became obsessively essential in the practices and

representations of the British administration. The "control" became an instrumental element in the discourses of colonial administrators, defining Africa as a "continent waiting to be tamed" (Vaughan 1991, p. 38). The ideology of progress extolled the need to change the natives' behavior, described by British officials as ignorant and superstitious. See, for example, the Colonial development in Public Health Committee 1930 (Colonial Medical Service, PRAAD, Accra, CSO 11/1/339), in which the British administration aimed at understanding the development of the health system and improving its structure. Moreover, see the amendments related to the hygiene in the markets of the colony, such as the Market Model Bye-Laws of 1944 (Native States Market Bye-Laws, PRAAD, Accra, ADM/11/1/1583).

64 Addae (1997, p. 115). In urban areas, the permission for the construction of new dwellings became necessary, crumbling houses were demolished, the garbage was thrown in proper places, specific areas for the slaughter of animals were identified, the construction of public latrines was encouraged and hygiene habits of individuals were regulated (Schirripa 2005, p. 110).

65 Sanitary Bye-Laws under the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance (1883), PRAAD, Accra, (ADM/11/1150/1910).

66 Addae (1997); Curtin (1992); Schirripa (2005).

67 It is the case of Victoriaborg, a neighborhood that was built halfway between the capital, Accra, and the ancient Danish settlement Christiansborg (Schirripa 2005, p. 111). In this area, a considerable attention was devoted to health and hygiene, as proved by some national documents of the National Archives of Ghana: see, for example, Sanitary Required Amenities at Amantra area, Christiansborg 1944 (Sanitation and Conservancy in Christiansborg, PRAAD, Accra, ADM/11/643).

68 Patterson (1981, p. 19).

69 The natives who had access to isolated neighborhoods were the servants that could circulate in the Europeans' homes only with a special permit, although they were not allowed to stay overnight (Addae 1997, p. 43).

70 Comaroff and Comaroff (2004); Rathbone (1993).

71 Luongo (2011, p. 11).

72 Some scholars critically examined media production, defined by Rosalind Shaw (2003) as *juju-journalism*. For an analysis of different factors that led to the recent explosion of witchcraft, see Bellagamba (2008).

73 Comaroff and Comaroff (1999).

74 See Ashforth (2001).

75 Luongo (2011).

76 Mary Douglas (1970) inaugurated a dialog among African and European witchcraft conceptions, and between anthropological and historical analysis. This work showed the relevance of the historical perspective for religious studies.

77 Luongo (2011, p. 18).

78 See the process of legitimizing of local remedies in Nigeria, Mali and Tanzania. In Ghana, a law recognizes and integrates traditional medicine into the biomedical system, seeking to transform it into a "real and proper science" (personal communication from an official of the Ministry of Health). Such a legal provision considers only practitioners who have their herbal products tested or undergo a training process as recognized practitioners (see Vasconi and Owoahene-Acheampong 2010).

79 See Bukuluki (2009); EACO (2009). In 2009, UNICEF and the Ugandan National Council for Children organized a conference entitled *Accelerated Child Survival and Development* in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and WHO. Nevertheless, the Ugandan official police report (see Inspector General of Police 2010) declared 29 child sacrifices in 2009 and 125 people arrested.

80 See Bernault and Tonda (2000); Comaroff and Comaroff (1993a); de Rosny (1992); Geschiere (1995, 1997).
81 Caprara (2001, p. 45). see also Bellagamba (2008).
82 Comaroff (1982, p. 144).
83 Comaroff and Comaroff (2004).
84 Comaroff and Comaroff (2004) examine how South Africans are dealing with such "dangerous" practices in an era in which their nation is becoming even more *poli*cultural. They argue how, in this process, an Afromodernity is taking organic shape in the interstices between new democratic institutions and the kingdom of custom; how the confrontation between 'culture' and a state founded on liberal universalism is beginning to reconfigure the political landscape of this postcolony.

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3 Witchcraft and dream

A discussion of the Akan case

Mariano Pavanello

In this chapter, I propose a preliminary exploration of the possible link of witchcraft with specific "dream cultures" (Laughlin 2011, p. 23), grounded on the idea of the reality of dreams. In such dream cultures, the alternation of different states of consciousness "between what we call 'waking' and 'dreaming' states" (*Id*., p. 35) is not sharply demarcated, and it is possible to reproduce in dream any real or imagined experience or to evoke and relive oneiric experiences in a waking state of consciousness.[1] The problem I propose is quite different from that of the relations of witchcraft with phenomena of altered states of conscience such as hypnotism, possession, trance, shamanic ecstasy and so forth, although there can be analogies and connections.

By witchcraft, I mean a supposed spiritual power, possessed by some individuals, that is believed to be able to affect other people even physically. Such a neutral definition is not generally accepted, and both anthropology and history offer quite different and more ambiguous descriptions, often mistaking witchcraft for so-called black magic or sorcery.[2] The early distinction between witchcraft and sorcery, inaugurated by Evans-Pritchard for the Azande[3] and followed by the mainstream in social anthropology from the 1930s to the 1960s and even later,[4] may appear fictitious because the two English words are synonymous,[5] and although probably applicable to many societies, it did not prove to be clearly so for all African cultures.[6] The contemporary worldwide tendency, both in scientific and public discourse, is to bring under the heading of witchcraft all beliefs and practices pertaining to the magic realm of evil-

doing.[7] Three ideas are universally professed by modern science on witchcraft: (*i*) the vagueness and fuzziness of the notion, (*ii*) its unreality, and (*iii*) its link with evil. The first two are closely connected because the perception of vagueness and fuzziness is primarily due to the dogma of the nonexistence of a clearly identifiable empirical or conceptual referent of witchcraft.[8] The ambiguity of the notion is first in the Western languages, but vagueness and incoherence seem to characterize local categories and beliefs even more than Western concepts.[9] The structural link of witchcraft with evil, moral ambiguity, and even the infringement of the most feared taboos, like incest and cannibalism,[10] is common both to the history of European witchcraft and to the colonial and postcolonial experience in Africa and elsewhere, albeit within very different ideological and philosophical frameworks.[11]

My hypothesis

The issue I discuss in this chapter is twofold. On the one hand, I want to investigate the nature of witchcraft, challenging the scientific bias of its unreality and the vagueness of the concept. On the other, I want to challenge the mainstream that considers witchcraft uniquely or mainly tied to evil, showing that it may also be characterized by positive moral connotations, and, although the border between good and bad witchcraft is ambiguous and fuzzy, good witchcraft is mainly involved in religious beliefs and healing practices.[12]

Anthropological research has very seldom taken into account the question of the reality of witchcraft as a legitimate one, preferring to shift the analysis to social, psychological and political explanations of what has always been considered as a superstitious belief in an illusory power or in imaginary events.[13] More critical and problematic attitudes may be found in some recent literature.[14] The hypothesis I set forth is that witchcraft is not merely an irrational belief. Should it be just that, witchcraft would be reduced to a trope,[15] and the study of it would be reduced to the analysis of the social conditions and consequences that accusations may produce (Evans-Pritchard 1935, p. 421), or to the political and economic framework in which such a belief may persist, develop and change (Comaroff and

Comaroff 1993, 1999), or the implications it may create (Geschiere 1997, pp. 24–25).

My hypothesis is that witchcraft pertains to the inner life of some individuals who share a peculiar sensitivity that may give access to (*i*) extrasensory perceptions; (*ii*) psychological suggestions – that a person may induce in him/herself as well as in other people with whom he/she shares sentiments and emotions; and (*iii*) psychological transference between two, or among more persons who are tied in a web of particular relations. All these types of phenomena are widely acknowledged by psychology, psychoanalysis and neurophysiology. Furthermore, it is quite possible that a person capable of inducing suggestions or transference can provoke psychic and sometimes even physical consequences in people who are in relation with him/her. I argue that witchcraft is supported by the ability to create and recreate in dream both real and imagined experiences, as well as reproduce the oneiric life in the waking state. This ability is possessed by individuals who both know how to exercise their mental life according to specific cultural patterns but also make a habit of doing so. We may also conjecture that the same cultural patterns are responsible for the dreams of people who claim to be bewitched. I will present and discuss some examples, showing how particular cultural features may produce a high degree of ability in exercising one's inner life and reproducing it in dream.

Summing up, the problem I raise can be outlined as follows: is there any empirical foundation of witchcraft beliefs that can make it possible to rationally understand statements and behaviors apparently incompatible with scientific rationality? The Western rationalist tradition of thought on this matter, since the seminal work of Evans-Pritchard, has solved this problem by denying the reality of witchcraft and pointing out some rational causation or social and political functions of beliefs and accusations, leaving aside what is inexplicable, which is considered as a cultural residual.[16]

As to the second aspect (the link of witchcraft with evil), I wish to develop a point that has already been raised by Barry Hallen (2001). This analytic philosopher discusses the Yoruba concept of *aje*.[17] He challenges the common Western view that classifies under the same heading all the notions that can be translated as witchcraft, and therefore as superstitious beliefs, and criticizes the idea that witchcraft should be identified only with magic evil-doing. His purpose is "to be more precise about the behavioral

dispositions the Yoruba associate with the *aje* as a personality type" (*Id.*, p. 85). He used an ethnographic method interviewing a good number of *onisegun* (healers, wise men), in order to get their opinion on *aje*. These people provided him with many statements outlining the profile of *aje* as a superior intellect.[18] Among the results of his investigation, he reports a good deal of illuminating sentences of this kind:

> As some people are more powerful than others, so also their intuitive insight is more powerful. There will be two eyes outside and two inside. We call them aje […]. Aje are good persons. Not all the aje are bad persons. A good aje cannot do anything bad.
>
> (Hallen 2001, pp. 86–87)

Hallen concludes that there can be both immoral and moral *aje*, and that these are people with an extraordinary ability, mainly connected with a second (spiritual) sight. We must stress that the profile of the good *aje* was outlined by those *onisegun*, who were credited with the same sort of power and characteristics as the *aje*.

Akan witchcraft

In order to discuss my hypothesis, I will take as my context of reference the Akan[19] set of ideas on witchcraft,[20] basing myself on: (*i*) two published works by Ghanaian authors, which I consider as having the status of ethnographic sources (Aboagye 1969; Bannerman-Richter 1982); and (*ii*) my own fieldwork experience in the Nzema area of Ghana.

The concept of witchcraft is expressed in Asante Twi by the word *bayi*;[21] witch, as a concrete person, is *ɔbayifo* (pl. *abayifoɔ*) in the feminine and *ɔbonsam* (pl. *abonsam*) in the masculine (Rattray 1927, p. 28). As McCaskie puts it, this term is probably derived from

> ɔba (child) + yi (to remove, take away): lit. "to take away a child", encapsulating the belief that witchcraft operated most potently within the abusua:[22]cf. bayi yɛ abusuade "witchcraft is inborn among or hereditary between [members of] an abusua".

(McCaskie 1995, p. 274)

The term *ayɛn* (specific of Fanti Twi) is also used as synonym of *bayi*. It coincides with the Nzema *ayɛne* (pron. ayènè), a term that may be used to mean both witchcraft as an abstract concept and witch as a concrete person.[23]

It may be of interest to quote the speech of Yao Adawua, an old *bonsam kɔmfo* (priest witch-finder), reported by Rattray:

> This old man accompanied me in one of my journeys [and] in many confidential talks he gave me the following information: The spirit of a bonsam came upon me like the wind, and thus I learned who the witches were and how to catch them. The majority of witches are women. The great desire of a witch is to eat people. […] Witches walk about naked at night. […] Witches can transform themselves into owls, crows, vultures, hyenas, leopards, elephants, snakes.
>
> (Rattray 1927, pp. 29–30)

It should be noted that Yao Adawua explicitly, but not overtly, declares himself to be a witch, this being a necessary condition for recognizing other witches. We shall return to this issue later. This sketch is one of the first descriptions that have been offered of Akan witchcraft,[24] perfectly consistent with colonial ethnography,[25] and coincides with the prototypical profile of the witch given by later scholars in different cultural contexts of Ghana.[26]

Within the Akan world, Nzema witchcraft is particularly famous.[27] George P. Hagan writes:

> The African mystical notions associated with him [Kwame Nkrumah] arose out of the fact that Nkrumah was a Nzema. The Nzema are famed for witchcraft. In the mind of average Gold Coaster, Nzema witchcraft, besides being powerful – perhaps the most powerful witchcraft anywhere – was reputed to be capable of being used for good ends. […] No one was prepared to say Nkrumah walked on his head at night. But people were prepared to believe that he had the power to make himself

> invisible, to disappear when he found himself in danger, and to be in several places at once.
>
> (Hagan 1993, pp. 188–189)

A good description is given by P. A. Kwesi Aboagye in a small booklet of 23 pages entitled *Ayɛne*, written in the Nzema language, published in Ghana in 1969 (with a second edition in 1977).[28] This booklet looks like a textbook for children aimed at presenting the folk beliefs on witchcraft and at answering the basic questions on the matter. In my opinion, it is highly interesting in that it has no scientific character, and its purpose is simply to set forth the popular attitudes towards witchcraft, presented as common sense and as a natural reality.

The book by Gabriel Bannerman-Richter (*The Practice of Witchcraft in Ghana*, 149 pages) was published in the English language in 1982 in the United States and has scientific pretentions. The author, a Ghanaian graduate at the University of California, presents to an international educated public a cultured description of Akan witchcraft. There are no clues that he knows Aboagye's booklet. Bannerman-Richter is a Twi-speaker who received an Anglican religious education in Ghana; he is, therefore, a product of an urban culture, unlike Aboagye, who – despite his intellectual training – belongs to rural Ghana and writes only for his country-folk. Aboagye takes for granted the reality of witchcraft, which he does not challenge, and develops his discourse inside the "traditional" Nzema world vision. Bannerman-Richter, by contrast, tries to develop a sort of syncretism between a dogmatic Christian vision and the elements of the Akan traditional culture reconstructed according to a work plan consistent with his intellectual attitude. He affirms the reality of witchcraft and discusses its origin and contradictory moral connotations on a universalistic ground, making reference to a supposed link of witchcraft with fertility rites[29] and with modern neopagan trends, concluding that the evil character of African witchcraft is probably a later transformation due to contact with Europeans (Bannerman-Richter 1982, p. 13).

The two works share a common bulk of beliefs. First, witchcraft is thought of as a real power:

> To the Akan and most people in Ghana, witchcraft is more than a mere concept; it is a real and tangible practice.
>
> (Bannerman-Richter 1982, p. 12)

> What really is ayɛne? Ayɛne is sunsum. Ayɛne is an insect. Others are bats. Some are python, vipers or millipedes. Ayɛne can change into any creature at all. Ayɛne can do a lot of things. […] Every witch can see spiritually things that the ordinary eye cannot see.
>
> (Aboagye 1969, pp. 5, 7)

"Ayɛne is sunsum" says Aboagye. *Sunsum* is a Twi word commonly used in Nzema to denote the spiritual force of a human being. Christian missionaries used this word to translate the concept of soul, but *sunsum* is something different from the Christian soul. It is the spiritual constitution of a person that enables him/her to live his/her life facing all the circumstances of human existence, joyful and sorrowful, great and terrible. *Sunsum* is transmitted from a father to his children and is the spiritual force that enables a father to protect his children. It is the mental disposition that gives a person his/her character, good or bad, strong or weak. "Ayɛne is sunsum" means that witchcraft is a particular kind of *sunsum*, a spiritual force that enables witches to do what ordinary people cannot.

Secondly, witchcraft is active outside one's body while sleeping:

> When a witch wants to fly in the night, he places a piece of thatch on his body lying on the bed, so that he does not wake up till he returns. The small thatch makes the person feel heavy. The body breathes though it cannot do anything. If such a person is woken up he does not speak and cannot sit up properly. He can only speak, stand or sit when the witch spirit has returned into the body.
>
> (*Id*., p. 8)

> The belief that a human being is capable of leaving his physical body behind in sleep and function in an invisible dimension is widely held in many non-Western cultures, and many people in the Western world are now beginning to subscribe to this belief. To the Akan, however, the

> belief is taken for granted and very few question it. […] It is a basic belief in Akan societies that a witch is a person who, as a matter of habit, can vacate her body and consciously participate in non-physical actions in another dimension of existence.
>
> (Bannerman-Richter 1982, pp. 12–13)

According to Bannerman-Richter, witchcraft is performed through "non-physical actions in another dimension of existence", which he explains as "astral projection" taking place through the "ethereal double" of the person. It corresponds to the Aboagye's expression *ayɛne nu* (in the witch's own way), which can actually be interpreted as the dreaming state within the frame of the specific Akan "dream culture", with its cultural faith in the reality of dream.

A third aspect shared by the two Ghanaian authors is the absolute awareness of their status that they acknowledge to witches:

> Another question frequently asked is: "Does the witch know that he/she is a witch?" Yes. Any person with witchcraft is aware of it.
>
> (Aboagye 1969, p. 17)

> The Akan form of witchcraft is an advanced practice of astral projection in which a person leaves her body and performs actions in an astral setting in full consciousness and then returns to her physical body at will.
>
> (Bannerman-Richter 1982, p. 13)

A fourth and crucial aspect is the moral ambiguity of witchcraft, since its power can be used both for good and evil purposes:

> The activities of witchcraft are both good and bad. Witchcraft can be used for protection. A witch can transform herself into a python and surrounds her children shielding them against other witches who may venture near them. Whoever comes closer to the circle will be attacked. Apart from the above, there are various ways used by others: some protect their family with a fence, whiles others use a shield of flames of

> fire. […] The deeds of some witches are good. They rescue victims who are the target of their wicked colleagues.
>
> (Aboagye 1969, pp. 7, 12)

> Obayifo, obonsam, all these denote a person who dispenses evil; there are some witches who possess all the essential powers for dispensing evil but refrain from using them. Some are even believed to use their witchcraft to protect their loved ones as well as innocent people.
>
> (Bannerman-Richter 1982, p. 16)

This aspect is present in the scientific literature. McCaskie affirms:"The Asante distinguished between the practices of *bayi boro* ("hot" or maleficent witchcraft; *boro*, hurt, malevolence) and *bayi papa* ("cool" or benevolent witchcraft; *papa*, moral good, benefit, welfare, prosperity)" (McCaskie 1995, p. 274).
Van der Geest offers the same ethnographic evidence. Interviewing an elder in the Eastern Region in Ghana, Nana Kwaku Agyei, he asked the old man "to explain what people mean by *bayie*. His answer was long and confusing":

> First he said that bayie does not exist, then he went on to explain what it is. First he stated that bayie spoils things and then he used the term to praise people for their intelligence. […] Several people argued that there is good and evil witchcraft. Someone who has been very successful in life must be a (good) witch. A sociologist colleague assured me that a certain man in Kumasi, whose children had all reached very high positions in life, was widely believed to be a witch. Witchcraft, he said is a kind of talent. He compared it to the "supernatural intelligence" of people like Newton or Einstein.
>
> (Geest 2002, pp. 437, 455)

A linguistic survey on witchcraft, carried out in Kumasi (Ghana) by Christiane Owusu-Sarpong, shows the same ambiguity as that witnessed by Hallen for the Yoruba *aje*. Among the answers she collected during that survey about the moral profile of people with *bayi*, there are many like "a

witch is a greedy person who is forceful and wicked"; and many others like "witches are people with special talents"; "a witch is a strong-hearted person"; "a witch is a man who is brilliant" (Owusu-Sarpong 1998, p. 102). I will show that the same link of an extraordinary ability connected with a power of a second sight is credited to various types of healers in the Akan world.

Among the bad deeds of witchcraft, the most important and repugnant are cannibalism and incest. Many witches are believed to be cannibals using their close relatives as victims:

> Usually the cannibals prefer eating in a group, each member providing his or her meal in turn […] using a beloved family member, or one who is very prominent in his/her family.
>
> (Aboagye 1969, p. 8)

> Witches with aggressive natures assume the forms of such animals as snakes and large carnivores like the leopard or the hyena. These are the witches considered to be the most dangerous threat to human life, for they are cannibals and relish the ethereal flesh of human beings.
>
> (Bannerman-Richter 1982, pp. 31–32)

It should be pointed out that the cannibalism of witches, particularly in a matrilineal environment like the Akan world, can be related to incest in that the verb *di*, used throughout the Akan area with the meaning of 'to eat', is widely used in many metaphorical senses, among which is that of having sexual intercourse. Therefore, eating the flesh of a matrilineal relative evokes the idea of an act of incest.

A particularly striking account of a witchcraft attack is published in Bannerman-Richter's text. The source of the story and author of the written report was at that time (1976) head of a department in the University of Cape Coast:

> On Sunday, 3rd September 1976, Esi (my wife) reported to me that John (my son) had made a strange confession to her. John told her that the previous night, Ekua (my wife's cousin living with us) met him, John, in spirit, and requested him to bring his little sister (Janet) for a meal. John

> said when he stretched his hand to grasp his sister (and for that matter to kill her), a goddess whom he identified as Nana Fiekwaata, the name of the river goddess at Akotokyir, a village near the University Farm, caught his hand preventing him from causing the murder. The goddess then ordered him to confess this nefarious act to his parents, otherwise she would have killed him. John confessed further that he had been requested on two previous occasions to kill his little sister by Ekua's mother, but he had declined. John said he acceded to Ekua's request because she had once invited him to a meal with plenty of human meat. He confessed that he himself was a devil in the form of a dog. He said Ekua was a devil in the form of a cat, and she was a queen and very powerful.
>
> (*Id*., pp. 75–76)

It is repugnant to a rational mind to accept this tale as a truthful account. John's confession looks more like a nightmare than a real experience. Moreover, we must notice that the boy refers to previous spiritual meetings with Ekua and Ekua's mother, who asked him to kill his sister. Therefore, the reported confession does not refer to a supposed unique hallucination but to a recurrent dream, and the various dream episodes share a common subject and a common story. Although Bannerman-Richter does not provide any other element useful for deciphering the story, we can interpret John's tale as an oneiric experience in the genre of "transpersonal dreaming" (Laughlin 2011, pp. 362 and ff.).

My ethnographic evidence

I was led to focus on witchcraft on various occasions during my long fieldwork. From 1989 to 2000, I spent 16 months mainly in Beyin, a small coastal town of about 2,000 inhabitants, the traditional capital of the precolonial western Nzema kingdom, where I resided on the premises of Fort Apollonia.[30] From 2002 to 2008, I spent 12 months living in a raffia hut in the small coastal village of Old Kabenlasuazo of less than 200 inhabitants, 10 miles west of Beyin. During both periods, although

witchcraft was not my primary concern, I had the opportunity to discuss in depth various issues about witchcraft with many people with whom I established strong friendly relations. Among them, I will cite: (*i*) an old diviner and healer (*ninsinli*)[31] who died in 2001 named Kodwo, living at Ngelekazo, a village of 300 inhabitants, 1 km west of Beyin, where he was also acting as caretaker of the local community spirit (*maanle bozonle*[32]), Ngelekà-Ngelekà; (*ii*) a well-known herbalist with a remarkable botanical knowledge, living in a town about 10 km from Beyin, whom I will give the pseudonym of Arizi; (*iii*) an old woman of Old Kabenlasuazo, a renowned *kɔmenle*[33] whom I will call Adwoba, who died in 2008; (*iv*) a very prominent elder of Bawiah (an inland village about 20 kms from Beyin), a healer himself, called Nyamekɛ, who died in 2007; (*v*) an elder of the village of Elenda, near the Tano river, named Bile Kenya, *ninsinli* and a renowned herbalist, who died in 2005; (*vi*) a 15-year-old boy, whom I will call Emu, living in Old Kabenlasuazo. *Ninsinli* Kodwo and Arizi claimed to be 'good' witches,[34] but I was told that Arizi was also known as a powerful *juju* maker (sorcerer), that is a person able to make *ayidane* (from *ayile ɛtane*, bad medicine, sorcery, poison)[35] and send it magically to the victim. Nyamekɛ, *kɔmenle* Adwoba and *ninsinli* Bile Kenya never told me they were witches but claimed to have 'eyes', or to be able to see the spiritual entities and interact with them. In fact, healers – both *ninsinlima* and *ahɔmenle* – need to entertain continuous relations with the spirits with whom they are connected and cooperate to heal their patients.[36] It means that they are able to see those spiritual entities, and speak with them. There are many people who claim to see the *awozonle* and speak with them[37] but do not declare themselves witches because they fear that their interlocutors would make improper use of the information. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that their claimed ability to see the spirits allows us to consider these people as witches according to local theory.

I will limit myself to producing and discussing some examples of the ethnographic evidence out of the many I collected. Some ideas were common to all my informants, and I can distill them from a set of similar sentences that I recorded from all of them. I can assume these sentences as elements of the local theory of witchcraft:

> To be [or to have] ayɛne means having a third eye that enables you to see the other witches, to see the spirits and talk to them, and to see at night, and see things happening far away.
>
> If you are [or have] ayɛne, when you are asleep at night, you get out of your body and wander or fly, and you can transform anything at all (including yourself) into anything else.
>
> When a ninsinli or a kɔmenle is/has ayɛne, he/she is much more powerful.[38]

The first most important element is the "second sight" (or "third eye") that enables the witch to see things concerning the spiritual realm, and, particularly, the other witches and the spirits, as well as whatever he/she needs to see at night or far away. It is actually during the night, when sleeping, that the witch claims to leave his/her body, flying and/or interacting with any spiritual entity. All my informants agreed that witches can do bad things, such as causing trouble, sending illness or misfortune, killing people and eating their flesh, committing incest, and so forth. But they also agreed that not all the witches are bad (*ɛtane*) – on the contrary, the majority of them are good (*kpalɛ*) – and that a lot of *ninsinlima* and *ahɔmenle* are good witches.

One day, Kodwo asked me to join him for a visit to the *bozonle* Ngelekà-Ngelekà, saying that since my first visit some years earlier, I had never paid a visit to the spirit, and that was not good.

[*From my field notes, 19 August 1995*] *Kodwo told me to come to him this morning very early with a bottle of gin and two hundred Cedis. At dawn, weather was foggy, and he was waiting for me under the small veranda of his compound. He brought me to the house of the spirit, a small hut in cement, under the coconuts, just a few yards from the shore. During the way, he told me the spirit was a white man and wanted to see me. He explained that Ngelekà-Ngelekà came with a ship that sank near the shore; he escaped bringing with him a dog with fire in its mouth (the symbols of the Twea clan; probably a metaphor for firearms) and landed. He was killed and became a spirit who never abandoned that place. Kodwo continued telling me that Ngelekà-Ngelekà flies in stormy nights with his vessel (echoing the legend of the Flying Dutchman). When we arrived in front of the hut, the old ninsinli waved his hand, stopping me, took from his*

pocket a small hand-bell and started ringing it several times. After few seconds, I heard him saying something but could not understand the meaning. Kodwo opened the small door of the hut, laid down the bottle of gin and the small sum of money I had brought, and started talking to the bozonle. After a while, Kodwo poured a libation, and then went on talking. It seemed he was having a true conversation of which I could grasp only his utterances in Nzema language. At the end of every sentence, he remained silent looking as if he was listening to somebody. But what surprised me particularly was that at the end of his conversation with his imaginary interlocutor, Kodwo turned back to me and told me what he had been talking with Ngelekà-Ngelekà. He said he had told the spirit my name adding that I was coming from Abolɔkyi (Europe, the country of the white people), and asking for protection for me. He said Ngelekà-Ngelekà replied to him that he knew me, and was happy seeing me, and said that he would always protect me. The meeting with the spirit lasted about half an hour, and at the end Kodwo cleaned the hut.

Afterward, the old *ninsinli* and I had some conversations about that meeting with the spirit, since I was eager to understand why Kodwo had wanted to give me that opportunity and why he was confident that I could believe in his relation with a spiritual entity. He often pointed out that it was particularly in the night that he could interact with the *bozonle*. Sometimes I asked him whether his meetings with the spirit occurred in dream, but the *ninsinli* did not give my question any importance.

The second most important element is the power of flying out of one's body at night. Arizi told me that almost every night he used to leave his body and fly, even far away, or walk around the streets of some town, meeting other witches as well as many dead people and talk to them. He stressed that when the witch flies at night, he/she is able to perform any marvelous action at all, like, for example, taking to somebody's home whatever is needed (even poisons or other types of *juju*) or transforming somebody's food into poison.[39]

I interviewed Adwoba, the *kɔmenle* of Old Kabenlasuazo, several times in August 2003 and February–March 2004. She claimed to be able to fly in the night and see witches; she claimed to have the power of blinding, and therefore definitely weakening the bad ones, preventing them from performing nefarious actions. She pointed out that such events occur mainly in the form of nocturnal struggles in the sky, and when a bad witch is

defeated, he/she falls from the sky and dies (spiritually) on earth, no longer able to reenter his/her body. She told me about some of her nocturnal travels looking for bad witches, saying that she would never reveal to me the names of those people.[40]

Nyamekɛ, the healer of Bawiah, was a short man about 55 years old; he was trained as a male nurse and had been working a long time at a Kumasi hospital. He was an open-minded man, with a mentality I would label as positivist.[41] He claimed several times that, at night, he was able to see the *mmotia*, who used to speak a whistling language and give him suggestions for diagnoses and recipes for medicines.[42] In 2002, I had two long, formal interviews with him, on 26 February and 15 September, in the presence of my wife. In the February interview, Nyamekɛ poured a libation and wanted his assistant, a young practitioner called Kwesi, to be present. On that occasion, he spoke for long about his nocturnal meetings with the *mmotia*. In particular, he told me that the small spirits taught him about the healing properties of some herbs and minerals that he showed me (but he did not allow me to take samples). Whenever Nyamekɛ mentioned his conversations with the *mmotia*, Kwesi was nodding; therefore I asked the young man whether he was present at the meetings of his master with the dwarfs of the bush, and he replied in the affirmative. This is one of the several examples I collected of experiences in dream reported as if they were shared by various people.

Ninsinli Bile Kenya was an elder of about 70 years when I met him in 1995. Immediately, from my first meeting with him, I felt he was an extraordinary personality. He was a silent, fascinating old man with a bright and piercing glance and a very gentle way of speaking. I went on seeing this man until his death in 2005. He passed on to me a lot of his amazing botanical knowledge, allowing me to take samples of the plants.[43] He confirmed to me that he had "second sight" and used to interact at night with a female *bozonle* named Akua who helped him in the treatment of his patients, revealing to him the hidden causes of their illnesses, and providing the medicines he prepared with the spiritual power necessary to be efficacious. He also told me that he was able to interact with the powerful *bozonle* of the river Tano, *Nana Azule Tanoɛ*, one of the most important figures of the Akan pantheon, who often used to visit him at night.

Emu, the 15-year-old boy whom I met in 2002 when he was 13,[44] spent almost a couple of months with me, during February–March and July–August 2004, chatting every evening for hours in front of the ocean. The boy was living with his divorced father, Emu's mother having escaped to Accra some years earlier. The father was on very bad terms with his wife's maternal relatives and often referred to his divorced wife and her matrilineal female relatives as witches. He had frequent quarrels with Emu's old maternal grandmother (a woman of about 60 years) who was living in a different town. The latter often threatened her son-in-law and ill-treated her grandson too. This situation made the boy suffer badly, especially because he was missing his mother. The most common topic of our conversations was therefore witchcraft. Emu claimed that the power of witches lies in their "sight", which enables them, day and night, to see everything spiritual and therefore to transform anything at all through their stare. He also claimed that witches fly in the night out of their bodies and may harm their enemies or protect the people they love. He was very eager to know whether I myself was a witch, because he claimed that I had often come to him in dream and that he experienced a strong feeling of protection coming from me to him. He also told me that some old women, his matrilineal relatives, and especially his real grandmother were harboring feelings of hate toward him because of some problems affecting the relations within his maternal line and particularly because of the bad relations with his father. That old woman came several times to him in dream, bringing him various illnesses. Actually, he had been suffering from a hernia for a long time. I asked his father why Emu had never been taken for treatment, but he replied that the hernia could not be treated because he claimed it was "natural". I told the man that it was only a physical problem that could be treated in a hospital, but his suspicious reaction suggested that there was something hidden behind it, most probably the belief that the illness was caused by matrilineal witches. I then decided, in August 2004, to take the boy to a good hospital, where in a few days a surgical operation was completely successful. Later on, in February 2005, Emu dreamed that the old woman and I were involved in a struggle, and I defeated the witch, who fell from the sky. From that night on, he felt recovered from all his health problems. Indeed, what was most intriguing is that a few weeks later, the grandmother died. He was obliged to participate in the funeral, but wanted me to accompany him in order to be protected from the bad spirit of

the dead woman. Although the night battle was fought only in his dream and the subsequent death of his grandmother was a mere coincidence, those events were to Emu's eyes the irrefutable proof that I was a witch.

The reality of dream

I am sure that none of the people I dealt with was telling lies, or joking, or tricking me; nor can I suspect that they were crazy or mentally disturbed.[45] Therefore, I presume there must be a different explanation for their affirmations and behaviors. Western science has always dismissed statements and beliefs of this type as hallucinations or tricks, or mere repetitions of traditional convictions (Boyer 1990). By contrast, there is a widespread awareness among African scholars about the existence of a "mystical" order governing the universe.[46] Similarly, it is assumed that some human beings know how to control and use "mystical" forces (Mbiti 1991, pp. 166–167). Moreover, the two dimensions of reality, material and spiritual, are not dichotomized (cf. Meyer 2012):

> for the Akan, the reality of an extra-physical world is as tangible as the physical, and in some cases, the sensitivity to it is even more keen than it is to the physical; they respect the validity of that world more than they do the physical.
>
> (Bannerman-Richter 1982, p. 13)

The distinguished Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu confirms this idea that seems to be shared by most African communities:

> The radical dualism of the material and the spiritual can find no home in the Akan scheme of reality. […] It is apparent from what has just been said that if the extra human beings of the Akan world view are not fully material, they are not fully immaterial either. We might note that, although the beings in question are not supposed to be generally visible to the naked eye, they are widely believed to be perceivable to the superior eyes of certain persons of special gift or training.
>
> (Wiredu 1996, pp. 50–53)

As Wiredu explains, "the difference between ancestors and deities on the one hand and humans on the other is the difference between the fully material and the partially material". Witches are thought to attack the vital essence. This essence is sometimes identified with the Akan concept of *kra*, or *sunsum*. In court records, it is translated into English as "soul". This essence is conceived as having a physical presence, as demonstrated in the preceding quotes (see Gray 2001, p. 343, note 18).

This particular version of monism that considers the spiritual and the material as merely two sides of the same reality provides a foundation for the uncertain ontological status of the claimed continuous interaction between psychic realities and the physical world. Another Ghanaian philosopher, Kwame Gyekye, affirms:

> extrasensory perception (ESP) has not been formally accepted as a form of knowing in the Western philosophy of knowledge. […] The case is different in African ways of knowing. […] I wish to point out an important feature of African epistemology that makes it distinct from Western epistemology, namely, spirit mediumship, divination, and witchcraft. These modes of cognition are of course occasioned by means that differ from, but work alongside (para), the normal. Divination, witchcraft, and spirit mediumship are psychical phenomena common in all African communities.
>
> (Gyekye 1995, pp. 201–202)

> Paranormal or extrasensory cognition is another mode of knowing recognized in African cultures. In African communities it is commonly believed that some individuals are born with extrasensory abilities with which they can communicate with supernatural beings or acquire knowledge in ways different from the normal. This type of knowledge is not acquired through experience and observation; nor is it acquired through the pure activity of the human mind. It is acquired instead through such psychical activities as divination and spirit mediumship.
>
> (Gyekye 1996, pp. 139–140)[47]

The idea of witchcraft as a mode of cognition implies that it is a power of the human mind.[48] A second crucial implication is that witchcraft is one of the means of interaction between the mental and the material. This Akan idea is firmly enshrined in a complex worldview that appears to be shared throughout most of Sub-Saharan Africa. A basic element of this worldview is the status of reality acknowledged to the oneiric experiences.

Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the belief in the power of dream. All the statements of my informants show that the 'sight' is connected to the inner life of dream, and that this latter is as real as the waking state of consciousness. This is a firm belief that is referred to also in a document circulating among a Facebook religious group directed by a would-be Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams and that I received the 31 August 2014 from one of my Facebook friends from Ghana.[49] A further implication of this ethnographic evidence is that the inner life of dream is thought of as having an influence, which can be even material, on the real world. Western observers were sometimes aware of the relation of witchcraft with dream, but they thought it was limited to accusations, as the following quotations reveal:

> Witchcraft accusations were based on four sources: dreams, spirit shrine-administered tests, tests by outsiders, and by confessions. People known as *ahoonk* were said to be able to detect witches by "seeing in the night," through dreams in which they witnessed the activities of witches. These people had the same power as witches, but they refused to take the lives of others. Their ability to "see" and to travel in the night, allowed them to warn relatives and neighbours.
>
> (Baum 2004, p. 212)

> Diola testimony about wrongdoings in the realm of the spirit was heard by the *commandant de cercle* as committed in the material realm. Crimes of the dream world had become crimes of the day (*Id*., p. 228).

I will now quote the text of a libation poured by *ninsinli* Bile Kenya on 25 August 1995, when he told me the history of his town and his family (Pavanello 2000, pp. 237 and ff.). In a ritual and sacred atmosphere, the elder evoked the presence of his ancestors, and as he felt they were there his

voice became trembling; he poured the gin on the floor again and asked them permission to reveal their secrets, fearing that they could get angry:

> Do not say that we are blurting out your secrets [*bɛmase kɛ yɛ lɛ tulutulu bɛ bo*], but learning your secrets is our custom [*na te bɛ bo ɔle amaamuo*], therefore if we tell the history do not get angry [*ɔti sa yɛka bɛ mafa nwolɛ ɛ yɛ*], and do not let something bad happen [*bɛ mama esane ɛtane biala ba nwolɛ*].

Then he declared that we, the men, are like babies, and our eyes are not yet completely open ("*yɛ le ngakula yɛɛ yɛ nye adebɛnwo*"). He went on addressing his ancestors and showing that the two levels of reality (waking and dreaming) are always in contact:

> what you told us [*bɛhanle*] and we listened to [*yɛdale*], the history [*edwɛkɛ*] that we know [*yɛdayɛ yɛze*] and tell [*yɛka*], some [*bie*] we forgot [*yɛlievi*] and do not know [*yɛnze*], but time will come [*ɔba dwu mekɛ ne*] that we sleep [*yɛda*] and you come [*bɛbaka*] and show us [*bɛkile yɛ*].

The oneiric relation with the ancestors is a recurrent theme in everyday life, and it is quite normal to listen to people who claim to interact systematically with their ancestors while dreaming. In particular, the elders with functions of lineage heads (*abusua mgbanyima*), the queen-mothers (a*bahema*, sing. *ɔbahema*), and above all the chiefs, from the simple headman of a small village (*ɔdikro*) or the chief of a town (*ɔhene*) to the paramount chief of a Traditional Area,[50] undergo a ritual treatment that makes them particularly sensitive to contact with their ancestors. Those people are actually the object of constant psychological pressure from public opinion, and this constitutes one of the main sources of their self-suggestion.

In September 1998, an elder from Kabenlasuazo, Bonya Aka, former chief of a village,[51] told me that when a chief must solve a problem, he stands in front of the stool whose name he bears, pours a libation and then goes to sleep. The spirit of the stool will come in dream to suggest the right decision. In January 1999, I invited a Nzema chief[52] to Italy and asked him

to lecture my students at the University of Pisa about the functions of Ghanaian chieftaincy, mainly in the field of customary law. During his speech, he declared that any time he had to solve a problem, his ancestors came to him in a dream to inform him of the issues he was not yet particularly aware of. My students looked astonished, and then he told them that once it had happened that he had to solve a very difficult case of disputed inheritance but lacked some crucial information. One night, his ancestors came in a dream and gave him the information he lacked. The naturalness of his statements increased the astonishment of my skeptical students. The chief perceived their skepticism, and pointing his finger towards me, said, "He knows, because he was there". I do not know exactly how I could act as witness because I could not be in his dream, but probably he thought I was present in that episode of his oneiric life because he told me that dream more than once and talked to me several times about his nocturnal meetings with his ancestors. Telling me his dreams made me – in his eyes – a witness of his inner life. Of course, I confirmed to my students the truth of the chief's tale.

Conclusion

It is clear enough that the Akan dream culture is based on a principle of reality that credits dreams with the same nature as the real world, or, at least, a nature very similar to the state of waking. Kodwo showed me he was talking to the spirit during the day in my presence. Was he reliving – as a waking hallucination – the same interaction he used to have with the spirit at night in a dream? Did Nyamekɛ use to see and talk to the *mmotia* when sleeping and dreaming? Did he interact with the *mmotia* even in the light of day because he was compelled to relive what was happening during his dreams? I think so, and am persuaded that this pattern is culturally molded. The strong capacity of elders and chiefs in these examples to influence their dream life is not at all unknown to psychoanalysis. The exercise of remembering and telling their dreams enables people to remember them better and better and even control them to a certain extent. Conversing with *kɔmenle* Adwoba, I became certain that the old woman was able to govern her dreams in the sense that her oneiric life was very often the result of her mental projects.[53] How much dreams are the product of real life is a topic

well analyzed in psychology, psychoanalysis and neurophysiology; but how and to what extent the systematic exercise of one's own inner life can produce the capacity of governing dreams is a question still open.

How, then, can dreams be conceived of as being as real as normal life? It is not possible here to fully answer this question, nor is it possible to analyze extensively the relation between witchcraft and psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic practice has shown that we can live in dream the circumstances we wish to determine in real life. Such a process may be induced by constant exercise in which we oblige ourselves to think intensely and continuously of a particular object. At the same time, we must train our inner life recalling and constantly recounting our dreams. Once the circumstances we wish to determine in real life are actually lived in a dream, it is only necessary to recall and repeat them in the waking state in order to give them a presumptive status of reality as they were real visions. Hallucinations during the waking state may be induced by cultural techniques among which we can cite the consumption of particular substances, the use of music and dance to induce a state of trance, and so forth. All these practices are well known in anthropology, but the function of dream is generally underestimated. In the cases discussed here, there is no reference to altered states of consciousness but only to the strong relation between dream and daily life as the key to understanding the principle of reality that governs the belief and practice of witchcraft. That relation may give sense to the statements of the witches I quoted earlier and may explain the narratives of Emu. In this latter case, the events did not happen in my dreams but in his, which was probably induced by the strong emotional relation that had developed between us, and Emu translated into the language of witchcraft the role I was playing in his inner life. I would say that Emu's was a case of transference, showing the close analogy between the psychoanalytic practice and the ethnographic dialog.

Notes

1 The experience of governing one's own dreams and reliving them in the waking state of consciousness is possible in psychoanalytic practice. I had personal experience of this during a period of (Freudian) psychoanalytic training during the Seventies.

2 The most widespread confusion in common discourse to this day, which was established in colonial times, is between witchcraft, black magic and traditional medicine (see Vasconi in this volume; Orde Brown 1935; Roberts 1935, p. 490). See Luongo (2011) for a good historical

analysis of the Kenyan case. The superimposition of sorcery and witchcraft, despite the formal distinction between the two, is frequent in anthropological literature (see Marwick 1965, ed. 1982). As to the European history, see Kors and Peters eds. (2001).

3 "We must distinguish between bad magic (or sorcery) and witchcraft. Many African peoples distinguish clearly between the two, and for ethnological purposes we must do the same" (Evans-Pritchard 1935, p. 417). See also Evans-Pritchard (1929a, 1929b, 1931, 1933).

4 See Nadel (1935, p. 424): "[*Witchcraft is*] some specific supernatural power which man can become possessed of, and which is used exclusively for evil and anti-social purposes". Middleton and Winter (1963, p. 3): "[W]itchcraft is a mystical and innate power, which can be used by its possessor to harm other people", while sorcery [*black magic*] is "the use of a magical craft or knowledge to harm or benefit others" (Stewart and Strathern 2004, pp. 1–2).

5 "Witchcraft: sorcery; power more than natural; enchantment; fascination" (*Webster Dictionary*). The etymology of 'witchcraft' is uncertain, probably from *wit* (faculty or power of the mind). 'Sorcery' comes, like the French *sorcellerie*, from the Latin *sors*, *sortis* (fate, fortune, lot). "In everyday speech and hence in English dictionaries, 'sorcery' and 'witchcraft' are virtually synonymous, they have become, in anthropological literature, convenient labels for the respective activities, real or believed, of the two types of mystical evil-doers" (Fortes and Dieterlen 1965, p. 23). See also Radcliffe-Brown ([1924] 1986) and Schapera (1970), who use indifferently witchcraft and sorcery as synonymous.

6 "To adhere consistently to this distinction faces certain difficulties … in some societies the distinction may not be clear-cut in the minds of the people themselves. Also, even where the distinction is sharply defined, it is often possible for the same person to be thought to practice sorcery as well as witchcraft" (Middleton and Winter 1963, p. 2). See also Mair (1969, pp. 16 and ff.), and, for European witchcraft, the historians Macfarlane (1970b, pp. 41–44; 1982) and Thomas (1971, pp. 463–465).

7 "We make no distinction between the terms witchcraft and sorcery, and use witchcraft as the general term for harm created through the manipulation of magic" (Bond and Ciekawy 2001, p. 26, n. 1).

8 Witchcraft actions have always been considered as putatively imaginary: "The assumption that witchcraft is inadmissible runs as a red thread throughout the literature…. The general omission of any systematic attempt to check the factual foundations (if any) of alleged wizardry phenomena is largely due to the researchers' *a priori* skepticism" (Grottanelli 1976, pp. 322, 324). Colonial administrators, as well as anthropologists and historians (*e.g.* Baum 2004, p. 204; Evans-Pritchard 1935, pp. 417–418, 421; 1937, p. 21; Melland 1935, pp. 495–496; Parrinder 1963, pp. 9 and ff.; Robbins 1959; Wagner 1954, p. 40) always denied the reality of witchcraft, dismissing local beliefs and accusations as mere fancies.

9 See Evans-Pritchard (1937) on the *mangu* of the Azande. More recent examples are offered by Boyer (1990, pp. 25–26) about the *evur* of the Fang, and Geschiere (1997, pp. 53 ff.) on the *djambe* of the Maka.

10 In field research conducted in Diola areas for a total of four years between 1974 and 2002, Baum focused on a series of trials, beginning in 1926, in which local French administrators believed they were prosecuting members of a secret cannibal society, while many Diola thought that the French were prosecuting witches. "Through the examination of Diola ideas about cannibalism and witchcraft, the oral traditions surrounding the trials, and the court transcripts themselves, it become clear that in most of these cases, what the administrators heard as charges of cannibalism – the eating of human flesh – were in fact, accusations of witchcraft – a witch's soul eating the soul of a sleeping victim. Most of the testimony concerned a world that French administrators believed did not exist" (Baum 2004, pp. 203–204).

11 For European witchcraft, see Ankarloo and Henningsen eds. (1993) and Kors and Peters eds. (2001). The demonization of witchcraft, particularly in the African case, is a central idea in

ethnographic works of missionaries like Christaller (1879, 1881, p. 11), Debrunner (1959, p. 1), and Parrinder (1949, 1963), and is clearly derived from European religious traditions. Similar ideas are shared in ethnography and religious studies: "Witchcraft is the exercise of evil through an immanent power…. Whereas magic may be malevolent or beneficent, witchcraft is invariably evil" (Lessa and Vogt 1965, p. 299); "Witchcraft is primarily a manifestation of strongly held negative emotions" (Kennedy 1967, p. 223); "Witchcraft as the expression of a malign power" (Stewart and Strathern 2004, p. 1). For the implications of witchcraft with magic and political power, see La Fontaine (1963, pp. 196–197) for the Ugandan Gisu; Beidelman (1963, p. 61) for the Tanzanian Kaguru; and Heusch (1982, pp. 19, 23, 162, 289–292) for Central and Southern African societies. For New Guinean and Melanesian societies, see Brown (1977, p. 26); Brown and Buchbinder eds. (1976); McIntosh (1983); Patterson (1974, 1975); Reay (1976, p. 2); Schram (2010); A. Strathern (1982, pp. 112–113, 121 ff.); M. Strathern (1990); Stewart and Strathern (2004). For the association between witchcraft and cannibalism in early modern Europe, see for example Rowland (1993, p. 167); for Melanesia and New Guinea, see Róheim (1948, 1950) and Steadman (1975).

12 An idea of the moral nature of witchcraft can be found in the beliefs on the so called *wicca* and the contemporary neopagan trends (see Greenwood 2000).

13 In the first half of the twentieth century, the mainstream in anthropology considered witchcraft beliefs and accusations as a conservative force, *i.-e.* as a means for controlling individual or social tensions (Kluckhohn 1944, pp. 76–128) or maintaining social control in small-scale societies (Gluckman 1968; Harwood 1970; Krige 1947; Marwick 1965 chapters 8–9; see also Middleton 1960; Nadel 1935; Wilson 1951). Some historians (Macfarlane 1970a; Thomas 1971) influenced by social anthropology suggested that witchcraft accusations had a social function (Burke 1990). Other scholars were more interested in cultural change as a cause of social stress and consequently of the intensification of witchcraft accusations and antiwitchcraft movements (Douglas 1963, 1967 1970; Gluckman 1963; Middleton 1963; Mitchell 1965; Richards 1935). Economic and political change and the struggle for power as the causes of the transformation of witchcraft ideology is the perspective followed by Balandier (1955), Bellagamba (2008), Fernandez (1982), Hartwig (1971), Parkin (1968, 1985) and Willis (1968). Most of the anthropological literature on witchcraft from the late Eighties focused on the ideological aspects connecting witchcraft to political power and wealth in the contemporary system of unequal relations, in a paradoxical link of witchcraft with modernity. See the Foucaultian trend, inaugurated by Comaroff and Comaroff eds. (1993), interested in the modernity of witchcraft and its innovative force in contexts characterized by neocapitalist development. See, also, among others, Bernault and Tonda (2000), Comaroff and Comaroff (1999), Moore and Sanders (2001). The modernity of witchcraft, as a political language, is also the target of Geschiere (1997, 1998); Geschiere, Meyer and Pels eds. (2008); LiPuma (2000); Meyer (1999); Meyer and Geschiere eds. (1999); Meyer and Pels eds. (2003); Sanders (2003); Shaw (2002).

14 A philosophical analytic approach is in Hallen (2001); Hallen and Sodipo (1986). Favret-Saada (1977, 2009) offers a deep insight stemming from the participation of the observer in the real practices. Some researchers attempted to analyze the value of participation in extraordinary experiences (see contributions in Goulet and Granville Miller 2007; Young and Goulet 1994). Wider perspectives for the understanding of witchcraft are in Bond and Ciekawy (2001), Geschiere (2013).

15 Typical of this orientation is the hypothesis discussed by Grottanelli (1974, 1976) and the statement of Geschiere (1997, p. 19): "sorcery/witchcraft is a 'discourse' that is real to the people who use it".

16 See, for example, Hegba (1979, p. 219), and for a rationalist interpretation in the footsteps of Horton (1967), see Marwick (1974). See also the discussion that followed Horton's paper (Appiah 1992; Hallen 1977; Wiredu 1997). For a wider discussion of these themes, see Hollis

and Lukes eds. (1982); Horton (1993); Horton and Finnegan eds. (1973); Kapferer ed. (2003); B. R. Wilson ed. (1970); Winch (1958, 1964); Wiredu (1980).

17 This author carried out a full analysis of Yoruba witchcraft discourse in Hallen and Sodipo (1986). "The term in Yoruba discourse that has conventionally been translated into English as witch" (Hallen 2001, p. 84).

18 "In Yoruba discourse one way in which extraordinary human beings are said to be distinguished from ordinary human beings is by the number of selves they possess. […] *Aje* generally are placed on the level above ordinary human beings in that they are said to have two selves" (Hallen 2001, pp. 87–88). An early testimony of this idea is in Marwick (1965, p. 80): "In general, Cewa describe sorcerers as 'very clever' ".

19 The term Akan refers to a group of populations, mainly of matrilineal descent, settled in a vast area between the Bandama river in Ivory Coast and the Volta river in Ghana, from the coastal line of the gulf of Guinea in the south to the southern edge of the savannah in the north, roughly between Bouaké in Ivory Coast and the northwestern branch of the Volta Lake in Ghana. Akan societies share a stock of cultural features (for the "Akan problem" see Chouin 2012; Kiyaga-Mulindwa 1980; Pavanello 2011; Pescheux 2003; Terray 1995; Wilks 1982, 1993, 2005) and a common linguistic *phylum*. Their languages belong to the Volta-Comoë group, divided into two subgroups: the proper Akan with the Wasaw-Bron and the Twi variants; and the Bia with the languages spoken in the western region of Ghana and in southeast Ivory Coast, like Ahanta, Anyi, Baule, Nzema and Sefwi (Dolphyne and Kropp Dakubu 1988).

20 The available ethnographic and historical literature on Akan witchcraft may include: Augé (1976); Bleek (1975, 1976); Debrunner (1959); Field (1937, 1940, 1960); Geest (2002); Goody (1957); Gray (2001, 2005); Grottanelli (1974, 1976, 1978, 1988); McCaskie (1981; 1995; 2005); Olsen (2002); Owusu-Sarpong (1998); Parish (1999, 2000, 2001, 2003); Parker (2004, 2006); Parrinder (1949, 1951, 1954, 1963); Rattray (1927); Ward (1956); Wyllie (1973). Allman and Parker (2005); Danquah (1928, 1944); Ephirim-Donkor (2008); Rattray (1929) and Sarbah (1897) may also provide some useful information.

21 Geest (2002) refers to *bayie* as the term for witchcraft among the Kwahu of the Eastern Region.

22 Rattray (1927, p. 28) insists that "a witch is powerless to use her or his enchantment over any one outside the witches' clan". Throughout the Akan area, the word *abusua* is commonly used in the sense of matrilineal descent group, *i.-e.* both matriclan and matrilineage (for a detailed analysis of this concept see Pavanello 2011).

23 In Nzema language, it is possible to say "to have" or "to be" *ayɛne*.

24 After the one given by Christaller (1881) and referred by Geest (2002, p. 448).

25 Middleton and Winter (1963, p. 3): "Often it is thought that the witch need merely wish to harm his victim. Usually witches are thought … capable of travelling great distances instantaneously, or having the ability to turn themselves into leopards, or going out in spirit and killing a victim while their bodies remain home in bed." Mair (1969, p. 10) and Mbiti (1991, pp. 166–167), from quite different intellectual positions, give perfectly similar descriptions.

26 See, for example, Parker (2006, p. 359).

27 "In Ghana itself, the most famous part [*for witchcraft*] is the westernmost region known as Nzemaland. Nzema witches are the only witches in Ghana who are not ashamed to proclaim and even brag out their witchcraft, for they claim that their brand of witchcraft is benign … they sell it to traders who desire it to advance their business" (Bannerman-Richter 1982, pp. 38–40). Debrunner declares: "I was able to make excursions to some of the modern anti-witchcraft shrines, to Nzima, the supposed land of the witches" (Debrunner 1959, p. 3). This reputation of the Nzema may have historical grounds, as Rattray reports that the famous 'fetish' *Fwemso* "had its head-quarters on the shore of Lake Bosomtwe. It was used ostensibly for the purpose of discovering witches, but [*also*] for purposes of blackmail and extortion. I believe this fetish was not of pure Ashanti origin, having been introduced from Apollonia" (Rattray 1927, p. 31).

28 Aboagye's booklet was translated into English by a local interpreter in the early Seventies for the use of V. L. Grottanelli, who published the translation with a rich commentary (1974, 1976).
29 See Murray (1952), and the criticism raised by Ginzburg (1991).
30 Eighteenth-century fortress built up by the British and restored after Ghana's independence under Kwame Nkrumah's presidency. Fort Apollonia lies near the shore and was used as a guesthouse for tourists until 2002.
31 *Ninsinli* (pl. *ninsinlima*; Twi *sumanni*, *sumankwafoɔ*) is a healer who uses divination techniques and naturalistic knowledge as well as a special relation with some spiritual entities but is not possessed by them (for the Asante, see Rattray 1927, chapter IV).
32 A *bozonle* (pl. *awozonle*; Twi *ɔbosom*) is a spiritual entity living in streams, rivers, trees, shrubs etc. The *awozonle* (also identified as "small gods") are similar to human beings but much more powerful and invisible and may interfere in human affairs. *Maanle* is the local political community (Twi *ɔman*). *Maanle bozonle* is the protecting spirit of a village.
33 *Kɔmenle* (pl. *ahɔmenle*; Twi *ɔkɔmfoɔ*) is a healer who does not use divination techniques and may have naturalistic knowledge, and his/her peculiar feature is the use of spiritual possession (see also Rattray 1927, chapter IV).
34 *Ayɛne kpalɛ*, the good witch who protects from evil, as opposed to *ayɛne ɛtane*, the bad witch who harms and kills people.
35 Popularly known throughout all Ghana with the pidgin term *juju*.
36 "*Sumanni* is just one who deals in *suman*, *i.-e.* charms. If we studied his methods superficially, we should say he was a herbalist, and so he is, in so far as he works with leaves and roots and plants; but there is this great difference – his medicines are not efficacious because of their antitoxic properties, but because of their magic properties" (Rattray 1927, p. 147). Rattray refers uniquely to the magic context of the healing practices, but here we must stress the peculiar relation that binds healers to their spirits with whom they interact; therefore, we must infer that they have 'eyes', as witches have.
37 Grottanelli reports an interesting ethnographic witness: "Kodwo Aka, an informant who claimed 'to have eyes', saw several small gods in the forest in the course of the years, and knew all of them by name. He explained: 'They are very big; normally they have short hair and wear a white girdle. As to their physical aspect, they are different. Adualu is very tall, thin and copper coloured. Anɔ Bula, a female spirit, is short, thickset and black-skinned, and Ezinli, another female spirit, is similar, but they cannot be mistaken because the face of Anɔ Bula is large and her nose is snub, whereas Ezinli is thin and bony' ". (Grottanelli 1978, p. 84).
38 This sentence is consistent with a statement by Aboagye: "A fetish priest who is a wizard is more powerful than a non-wizard fetish priest" (Aboagye 1969, p. 11).
39 Interview in February 2004.
40 Adwoba's and Arizi's tales are perfectly consistent with Aboagye's written text, which I would argue has become canonical for the orthodox Nzema theory of witchcraft.
41 I came to meet this man the first time in 1998. He was the head of the stool family of Bawiah, belonging to the Alɔnwɔba clan, who owned also the stool of Himan (Ghana, Wassa Fiase), considered as the elder brother stool, and the stools of Kabenlasuazo (Jomoro, Ghana) and Adjouan (Sannvin, Ivory Coast). In 1998, my wife, Alberta, was formally adopted by that Alɔnwɔba lineage; therefore Nyamekɛ considered her as his uterine niece and used to call me *misia*, in-law.
42 The *mmotia* (Twi *mmoatia*) are elves living generally in the bush, often credited with specific knowledge about medicine. Nyamekɛ's tale is consistent with ethnographic evidence reported by Rattray (1927, p. 38): "I constantly obtained the same answer to the question: 'How did you become a doctor?' The reply to this inquiry generally was: 'the *mmoatia* taught me'. My friend Kwaku Abonyowa related how, as a young man, he lived in company with the *mmoatia* [*who were speaking*] a whistling language". I often witnessed the use of whistling language (by

Nyamekɛ's son, for example) articulated according to the tones of the spoken language in the same way as the drumming language (see Cappelli and Pavanello 2009, p. 160).

43 In 2004 and 2005, I coordinated a survey on the use of plants in traditional medicine (see Pavanello and Schirripa eds. 2011). R. Gullà was working with me collecting botanical samples that were sent for identification and analysis to the University of Pisa (see Gullà 2011; Tomei *et al.* 2011).

44 This boy used to stay with me at home during my fieldwork, helping me and my wife with the housework.

45 Rattray (1927, p. 25) raises the same problem referring to his attempts at getting some evidence for the statements of his interlocutors about what they claimed to see (particularly the *mmoatia*). Similar questions were raised by the historians about the supposed confessions of witches in early modern Europe, although they were mainly extorted by torture (see, for example, Ginzburg [1966, 1989], 1993).

46 See Mbiti (199, pp. 41–42). I give 'mystical' the sense of 'spiritual'.

47 See also Hegba (1998); Bassong (2013); Ephirim-Donkor (2008).

48 See also George (1995); Goulet (1998); Goulet and Granville Miller eds. (2007); Goulet and Young (1994).

49 The document is directed to the members of the group warning them about the danger of having sexual intercourse with the devil in "dreams … that you know are as real as life, dreams where you cannot exactly distinguish the real from the unreal". The full text of this document is quoted in the first chapter of this book, Agencies, Jurisdictions and Paradigms in the Shaping of Witchcraft. Analogous problems of relations between dreams and religious life are dealt with in Fabian (1966).

50 Traditional Areas, in the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, are the heirs of the ancient precolonial states.

51 He was the chief of Ngelekazo from 1968 to 1988, with the stool name of Andoalu Kwedjan III.

52 Nana Aippila Sam III, chief of Edobo.

53 *Ahɔmenle* normally undertake a long process of training (seven years) that involves a very strong exercise of their inner life.

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4 Witchcraft and religion in the process of formation of the public space in Ghana

Angelantonio Grossi

Accra's disenchantment

On a Saturday afternoon, I am sitting with some Ghanaian friends around a table in Osu – a busy commercial area in central Accra – drinking local cocktails. We are meeting in a well-furnished and refined bar. Pan-African leaders' images, from Kwame Nkrumah to Thomas Sankara, dress up the black and red colored walls, and the staff is preparing the stage for the evening's live show. At the table, everyone is simultaneously looking at their own smartphone screens while also taking part in the conversation. A sponsored free wireless network allows us to keep track of our activities by posting pictures and comments on Twitter, the 140-character social media platform, creating a sort of multilogue that goes way beyond the physical space we are in. The bar itself is very popular among the educated youth of contemporary Accra. People like to meet here to enjoy the carefully curated selection of music performed by both the most famous local artists and the rising celebrities of the African diaspora. The place has a rather renowned position, aiming to play a major role in the reimagination and rejuvenation of Ghanaian identity. This purpose is shared by the people I am meeting, who bring into question on a daily basis the issues and challenges of modern Ghana. They are not part of any existing political party, nor are they interested in creating a new one. What they do is the expression of themselves in a collective space conceived primarily through their

relationship with digital media. In other words, through Internet, they inhabit the public sphere of the country in a very persistent and visible way.

Without the bonds of kinship and ethnic identities,[1] they show themselves unwilling to talk about religion or issues related to spirituality. Accordingly, the meeting I am taking part in is one of the several occasions on which the opportunities offered by Internet-driven media to deal with the main topics of our time are discussed in a very rational way: political participation, social change, anticorruption measures. Considering these features, Habermas's idea of the public sphere comes straight to mind here, especially for the emphasis the concept places on the "rational-critical debate carried on by a homogenous public of citizens" (Habermas [1962] 1991, p. 179). Homogeneity, in the form of common interests shared by a specific group, is at the core of the concept and constitutes the basis of the consensus-formation process from which Habermas draws the political function of the public sphere. The common cultural background of the people attending the meeting makes the scenario described so far have many points in common with this formulation. Anyway, as has been noted,[2] Afromodernity is actively forged in many ways and in a plurality of spheres (Mbembe 1992, p. 5) to such a degree that – more than in any other context – it is not possible to reduce it to a single and fixed dimension.

Finding magical modernity: Nana Kwaku Bonsam

Some months later, I am in Northern Italy spending a few days with a Ghanaian traditional priest who is visiting some fellow nationals who have migrated to Europe. Sitting on the couch, holding his smartphone and a shiny white Samsung tablet, the priest appears to be very busy. VoIP calls and text messages arrive constantly. People from all over the world try to get in touch with him, looking for advice. He is willing to help, dispensing support with the involvement of his spiritual god, *Kofi oo Kofi*.[3] His name is Nana Kwaku Bonsam and he is a public figure in Ghana and, since he cast a *juju* – a ritual act of evil magic – on a famous Portuguese football player during the 2014 FIFA World Cup,[4] he has also achieved global recognition. People from the African diaspora[5] publicly follow him on Facebook, listen to his speeches on the radio and watch his podcasts on

YouTube. Considered as a powerful spiritualist and a prominent exponent of traditional religion (see Meyer 2012, p. 103), Nana Kwaku Bonsam describes himself as a "fetish priest" able to help in the many fields of contemporary life, from business-related issues to health and spiritual problems. Digital media are central actors in his work, and they have given him the opportunity to shape an identity that crosses the boundaries of traditionally and geographically defined community.[6] Quoting Anderson (1991), it seems here that new technologies prove to play a major role in forging imagined communities even if, conversely to the previously asserted nationalistic horizon, these are not confined anymore to the "territorial and conceptual space of the nation-state" (Meyer and Moors 2006, p. 3). Victoria Bernal recently scrutinized the Eritrean online presence, revealing how cyberspace might seem like "a unique and transborder political space" used by diasporic users "as a kind of off-shore platform for civil society" (Bernal 2014, p. 62). Similarly, even if his activities are hardly ascribable to civil society formulation – this will be discussed later – through the Internet, Nana Kwaku Bonsam has also succeeded in creating a space where people can engage with him in a trusting and intimate relationship, thereby filling the gap of physical distance. Indeed, his personal website acts as a proxy of his identity, presenting his services in a very professional, refined and almost secularized way.[7] In this sense, modern technologies have given him an essential framework for reaching a broader public and entering the "mass mediated religious marketplace" (De Witte 2012, p. 157). This process – the blurring of the boundaries between religion, entertainment and commercialization – has become a trend in the context of postcolonial societies, where it seems to be more evident than elsewhere.[8] Moreover, thanks to a continuous media presence, he takes part in the Ghanaian public sphere, where he is struggling to assert the validity and legitimacy of traditional religion practices. Bringing to light a realm that has always been portrayed as dangerous, dark and populated by invisible forces,[9] Bonsam is totally at ease speaking publicly about *juju* and other spiritual-related matters. He refuses the devilish aura commonly associated with traditional rituals, while at the same time showing, through public performances shared on his social media platforms, the connection he has with the spiritual forces. Bypassing the popular discourse on witchcraft – he is

unhappy to be called a witch doctor – he affiliates his powers and the cult he represents under the religious domain. In doing so, he reclaims the status of African traditional religion and, acting outside the intellectualist approach of other more institutionalized groups,[10] he challenges the media monopoly of the "New Christianity" churches (Gifford 2004), breaking the barriers of what was previously observed as an "antagonism between traditional powers and modern technologies" (Meyer 2006b, p. 443).

Beyond civil society

Back to Habermas and his concept of the modern public sphere – on which many have passed strict scrutiny – the evidence described so far seems to force reconsideration. Under the rule of democracy and its universalist ideological foundation, the public sphere is considered a key space where public opinions are shaped and citizens are informed, a place of Weberian disenchantment and an incubator of secularity. To this extent, Wasserman highlighted how media in Africa are "widely regarded as having the potential to contribute to the exercise of civic rights and responsibilities" (Wasserman 2011, p. 5). However, it is worth mentioning that media themselves are central to many other practices, not least the religious and spiritual activities briefly described here. Indeed, we must remember that the suggested rational framework has to face the reality of everyday life and people's needs, aspirations and imaginaries. Moreover, reading the work of the German philosopher, the public sphere comes together in its genesis with another problematic and greatly discussed concept: *civil society*. Habermas precisely defines the public sphere as "an organ for the self-articulation of civil society" in the process of privatization of religion (Habermas [1962] 1991, p. 74). Based on this, Calhoun distinguished the two concepts, underlining how the public sphere represents a potential space for people organized in civil society and formulating questions about who really takes part in it and which groups are excluded.[11] To answer these questions in the context of modern Ghana, we must say that the people mentioned in the opening of this chapter, who occupy the conjunction between the urban space of contemporary Accra and the transregional global dimension of the Internet, seem to fit perfectly into the vaunted category of *civil society*: an analytic construct that today, in the age of

neoliberal capitalism, "serves to give shape to reformist, even utopian visions" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). As I had the chance to observe, they are young self-determined citizens who constitute an elite who cares about its country and wants to take part in the project that underlies it. By meeting regularly and engaging spontaneously in open and public discussions on the Internet, their approach to digital communication reflects the global dimension they live in and acknowledges – despite the practices embodied by Nana Kwaku Bonsam – the role played by the media in fostering disenchanted civil discourse. Indeed, as Hyden pointed out, one of the key features of civil society is voluntarism: the deliberate choice people make to participate and join, becoming part of an organization devoted to sharing common values (Hyden 2010, p. 253). Despite the fact that in the African context associational life has always been very active, it has generally been seen to be limited to networks in which rights and duties come from ascribed status.[12] It is here that civil society organizations (CSOs) – as they are described by international institutions (United Nations, IMF, World Bank and so on) – are supposed to come onstage, creating a space that "spans across kinship boundaries" (*Id*., p. 254) and at the same time have the capabilities to deal with administrative processes and the market realm.

In Africa, this process has been in motion since the reforms forced by structural adjustment plans during the 1980s. It was at this time that the political scene opened itself to voluntary and private sector participation, and the concept of civil society became more and more popular in both vernacular initiatives and international organizations' policies, highlighting the capacity of people to organize themselves independently of or beyond the state (Calhoun 1993, p. 271). For instance, in Ghana, thanks to privatization and liberalization of the market, new waves of actors have gained the chance to shape public life. Some of them have clearly embodied the traits of CSOs,[13] but others – as is the case with the traditional priest mentioned earlier – have brought a different discourse that, quoting Calhoun (1993), cannot be included in the civil society category because it lacks a clear rational configuration. Nevertheless, the liberalization of the once state-controlled media has offered religious movements new opportunities for visibility. Pentecostal-charismatic groups, whose presence has been fueled by commercialization of radio, TV, film and the press (Meyer 2006a, p. 200), have been the most skillful in taking advantage of

the new media public spaces, challenging the established legal and political order (Shipley 2009, p. 523) and at the same time boosting the neoliberal self-determination values. So today, even if the concept has a history as long as it is vague, rooted in Western European Enlightenment, civil society is still addressed as one of the main elements of neoliberal democratic order.[14] Considered as a third force,[15] able to mediate the power of the state, it is mainly conceived as an institutional arena where democratic processes and the public sphere collide in the universal principles of publicity, transparency and open, rational debate (Ferme 1999, p. 162). This is particularly true in development discussions on the Global South, where CSOs are considered the fundamental actors of empowering initiatives, claiming their capability to represent the hopes and aspirations of local people (Wekwete 2010, p. 278) in addition to "serving the collective interests" (Calhoun 2011a, p. 311). During the last decades, many authors have asserted their concern over the peculiarities of civil society in Africa, and still there is no agreement regarding its actual configuration. Notably Mamdani (1996), among others, has expressed the most articulated critique of the concept, urging that the socio-historical peculiarities of the African context be brought into analysis. In acknowledging the programmatic and ideological aspects of civil society discourse, he has called for the historical dimension in which it had its genesis to be considered.

Western thought – ranging from Ferguson to Hegel – has positioned civil society at the core of modernity by marking the transition from subjection to citizenship. It is a time of changes that can be traced back to secularist ideology, the emergence of the aforementioned public sphere and the rise of an urban bourgeois society. That is to say that, once it is brought into a nonWestern setting, like contemporary Ghana, the civil society discourse must face a pretty major problem of representation; otherwise it risks lapsing into Eurocentrism (Sharma and Gupta 2006). Indeed, in Africa "there are no one-dimensional and homogenous societies" but rather "many poles, created by various social actors" (Bayart 1986, p. 117–118). Theorizing the "bifurcated state", Mamdani refers to this configuration, showing the need to connect it to the politics of colonial rule: the creation of two different spheres of action, ideally located in the rural and urban contexts. Civil society, as has been conceptualized in European thought, refers to the latter. The urban environment, where independence movements took shape, has been a space in which the rationality of the colonial state

was in motion – carrying out the civilizing mission on many levels (see Vasconi in this book) – to forge the colonial citizens and still today represents the main terrain in which people pursue democratization initiatives and reclaim civil rights. Here, the horizon delineated by international institutions is that "the attitudes, norms and behaviors associated with democratic citizenship must be imparted and a vibrant civil society developed" (Burnell 2000, quoted in Hyden 2010, p. 256) in order to enter the realm of secularized, disenchanted and rational modernity (Taylor 2002, 2007). But what happens to those who cannot be addressed as part of this rationality? Is it possible to ascribe their practices to the citizenship domain?

Juju, citizenship and political action

The reference to citizenship is indeed problematic because it has "tacitly been granted to have a narrow secular configuration" (Calhoun 2011b, p. 75). Instead, the African setting, including the Ghanaian one, has turned out to be deeply permeable to a conception of the material world as being inherently linked with the invisible realm of the spirits (Meyer 2012, p. 93). This configuration, which the Enlightenment rationality conceptualized as overtaken by the move toward modern disenchantment, in the last decades has been reassessed at the heart of modernity.[16] So the world Nana Kwaku Bonsam aims to represent can actually be approached only referring to this dimension and, even if his realm remains excluded from the promoted field of civil society, his means of action shows how classical witchcraft matters have achieved their own spaces, occupying and shaping the very sphere of civil society. On a more conceptual level this means that a broader perspective is needed to deal with the previously mentioned heterogeneity of the modern Ghanaian public sphere. Borrowing the suggestion made by Chakrabarty (2000), an effort must be made in provincializing the inner value of these constructs to grasp the peculiarities of a nonWestern scenario that, at first glance, can appear irremediably irrational. Masolo notices how Western models have been accorded undue privileges and, once we agree that all knowledge is profoundly indigenous, any oppositional category, whether traditional or modern, appears to lack consistency (Masolo 2003). Consequently, the resilience of occult forces in the space of the public

sphere of Ghana's everyday life should be considered as a challenge to the disenchanted and rational presumption commonly promoted by CSOs and international organization initiatives.

Therefore, recalling the role of Nana Kwaku Bonsam in the context of modern Ghana opens the door to an intriguing way to look at the spiritual domain as the relation with digital media is refiguring it. Gabriella Coleman used the definition of "the prosaics of digital media" (Coleman 2010, p. 495)[17] to look at the way the everyday reliance on digital technologies gives new forms and opens new spaces through which different groups, including religious actors, can express themselves. For this reason Bonsam is an extraordinary example of a cosmopolitan figure who, thanks to a privileged relationship with digital mediated communication, has succeeded in the creation of *his* own public spaces. Recently he proved to be very clever at entering the secularized domain of political life by producing a series of public and controversial claims that besiege the claims of universalism – i.e. rational discussion as a tool of political participation – embodied by CSOs.

During the 2014 crisis of the Ghanaian currency, the press started echoing rumors about members of the government accusing spiritual forces of being the cause of the uncontrolled depreciation. They were specifically blaming dwarfs, popular figures symbolizing the magical otherness, for having conspired against the nation. Following this news, Nana Kwaku Bonsam asserted that the real ones to blame were the politicians. For this reason, he publicly claimed to have performed a *juju* against any member of the parliament who had deliberately stolen money from the Ghanaian people. Immediately many news websites quoted his unsettling warning:

> Speaking to Hello FM's King Edward Wednesday, he [*Nana Kwaku Bonsam*] warned that his spiritual god, 'kofi oo kofi' (sic) will strike anybody who steals from government coffers with hypertension, pot belly and other serious and strange diseases.[18]

He also added, with a note of scorn for the alleged spiritual explanation, that it was not acceptable on the government's side to blame dwarfs, since the "corrupt activities of the politicians" are the main and only reason for Ghana's crisis.

This episode stresses the supposed distinction between secular politics and spiritual imaginary elements, spurring many questions about the bonds

connecting the public with the spiritual sphere, the role and the configuration of citizenship, and the nature of political action. Occult forces and politics have been studied in detail for a long time, revealing that they have complex and strong relations,[19] not only in Africa but worldwide (West and Sanders 2003). This scenario appears to reach extremes, almost an antithesis of the rational public sphere discussed at the beginning. Thus, the dimension of citizenry as it emerges from here marks what Asiegbu (2012, p. 243), investigating the origins of the occult belief and its persistence in contemporary West Africa, quoting Ekeh, defined as the "precarious relationship with the state" (Ekeh 2004, p. 25) and Ashforth (2005) called the persistence of "spiritual insecurity" in democratic order. Such a public sphere populated by occult powers – even if under the form of rumors[20] – brings forth very serious questions indeed regarding liberal democracy, undermining its promise of transparency and denying the disenchantment assumption pledged by secularism.

Moreover, by doing a *juju*, Nana Kwaku Bonsam carries out an action that is supposed to interfere with political life, placing himself between the state and the people's domain. In this sense, calling for the imagination of his fellow nationals to be mobilized – the possibility that a spiritual entity will materially act – he is exercising a counterpower against the dominance of bad politicians. Ironically, despite his methods, this is quite a secularized ambition. Indeed, his ritual has all the features for being regarded as an actual political action and, indeed, asks for a broader formulation of the concept. Graeber argued on this, observing that if we acknowledge a political initiative as an action "meant to influence others who are not physically present", then "from one perspective, magical action [such as a *juju*] might seem one of the purest forms of political action" (Graeber 2007, pp. 130, 140). In Graeber's consideration both types of action need to be placed onstage in order to be widely received by other people, simply because to be effective they have to circulate and reach a broader context of narration and discussion. This framework seems to be very suitable for the practices of Bonsam, whose rumors quickly circulate through the digital media dimension both in Ghana and abroad.

In conclusion, the popularity reached by Nana Kwaku Bonsam demonstrates not only how under a democratic setting the so-called European rationality has not become hegemonic but also how its own peculiarities, such as liberalization and media-driven public space

formation, gave new possibilities for the articulation of occult and religion-related practices. The formation of a public Internet space is therefore an open-ended process where disenchantment is just one of the available options. Indeed, digital media have shown to be ambivalent actors, both fueling liberal associational life and boosting spiritual connections. As noted by Meyer, far from promising disenchantment, it seems that secularism itself actually brings a "reconfiguration of religion in the setting of (post)colonial modernity" (Meyer 2012, p. 89). Consequently, the highly regarded process of Euro-modern democratic order should be reconsidered in its presumptions. Witchcraft and the religious realm, once they have been granted a place within modernity, can ultimately influence and reshape the civil society formation process by being both at the core of public space and – as in the aforementioned *juju* episode – openly dealing with the political and democratic questions of our time.

Notes

1 The emergence of new arenas of public debate that create links between people who do not share the same ethnic and cultural backgrounds has been discussed by many scholars. See Eickelman and Anderson (2003), Meyer and Moors (2006).
2 See Comaroff and Comaroff (2004); Mbembe (2001).
3 *Kofi oo Kofi* is the name of the spiritual being who possessed Nana Kwaku Bonsam. As he has stated many times (personal website; newspapers; personal communications) he was not born a fetish priest but acquired his powers as a result of that possession. Today *Kofi oo Kofi* is the name of the cult based in the Ashanti Region of Ghana.
4 Once it was clear that the Ghana national team would have to confront Portugal in the final tournament of the FIFA World Cup in Brazil, Nana Kwaku Bonsam claimed he had cursed a famous football star and team captain with a *juju.* When the player was rumored to be injured just a few weeks before the match, the global mediascape exploded, tracing back the connection to Nana Kwaku Bonsam's ritual. Among others, on June 4, 2014, *The Washington Post* had the following headline: "Ghana witch doctor claims to have caused captain's injuries". Article available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/early-lead/wp/2014/06/04/ghana-witch-doctor-claims-to-have-caused-cristiano-ronaldos-injuries/.
5 He is a frequent flyer, visiting the communities of the Ghanaian diaspora from Europe to North America. In an article published by the *New York Times*, "A Visit From the Devil", July 19, 2013, journalist Jed Lipinski describes his stay in New York: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/21/nyregion/feared-traditional-priest-from-ghana-spends-a-year-in-the-bronx.html?pagewanted=all&_r=
6 For a brief historical perspective on the role and the social position of traditional priests in Ghana, see, among others, Maier (1981) and Twumasi (1979).
7 The website resembles both a business card and a celebrity webpage. Visitors are welcomed by a biography, a playlist of videos from television shows, an agenda of the events Nana Kwaku

Bonsam will take part in and a form for submitting any kind of request. It is available here: http://nanakwakubonsam.org/, last accessed December 17, 2014.

8 A number of researchers have debated the increasing spectacularization of religion-related topics both in Africa (De Witte 2005; Shipley 2009) and the West (Bobby 1997; Bruce 1990).

9 Many Africanist scholars in the past years have observed what appears to be a return of witchcraft and occult forces in an extremely graphic and violent guise. They have also strongly highlighted the modern peculiarities of this scenario (Bastian 2003; Comaroff and Comaroff 2002; Geschiere 1997; Moore and Sanders 2003).

10 About this tendency that Peel (1994) called "culturalization", see the detailed work of De Witte (2004, 2008) inside the Afrikania group and its quest to give a quasi-normative shape to the African traditional religion in Ghana.

11 Calhoun (1993). The Habermasian public sphere was notoriously a middle-class one-gender space, leaving out women and the lower classes.

12 The ascribed status mentioned by Hyden (2010) is usually defined by kinship and ethnic affiliation.

13 Gyimah-Boadi (2004, p. 100), leader of the Ghana Center for Democratic Development, mentions the associations and unions which asked for civil liberties playing a key role in the transition from Jerry Rawlings's rule to nowadays' democratic order: the Bar Association, the National Union of Ghana Students and the Christian Council.

14 Here I'm following Elizabeth Garland's (1999: 94) analysis, which tries to go beyond Gramsci's view of civil society as "the realm in which the States exercise hegemony", considering it as a structural force of Western liberalism serving as a tool to distribute "normative political values and practices as universals".

15 Conventionally alongside the state and the market.

16 See, among others, Ashforth (2005); Calhoun *et al*. (2011); Comaroff and Comaroff (1993); Geschiere (1997); Meyer and Pels (2003).

17 The use of "prosaics" refers to Bakhtin's work where the term addresses the "ideological and material conditions that sustain not only dominant languages, but also … formations that can disturb the coherence of monologic languages". Bringing the concept into a study of digital media means placing attention on "the material and ideological functions produced and sustained by digital technologies" (Coleman 2010, p. 495).

18 The quotation refers to the Ghana Web article "Kwaku Bonsam invokes curses on Anita Desooso …", February 12. Last accessed December 19, 2014, available at: http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=300488.

19 Probably the best-known anthropological work on witchcraft and politics in postcolonial Africa is Geschiere's *The Modernity of Witchcraft* (1997), showing how witchcraft is not only something evil and dangerous but also provides the possibility to access unknown powers. In this direction many researchers have described the nexus between occult forces and politicians as a way to achieve wealth and maintain social positions (e.g., Bastian 2003; Hengehold 2009; Piot 2010).

20 Burrell (2013) argued the strong material effects produced by circulating rumors in both traditional and digital media. Others (Stewart and Strathern 2004) showed how rumors, gossip and witchcraft are intertwined themes that need to be addressed in the world of social and political analysis.

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5 Where Christianity is ancient

Pentecostalism, evil in the world and the break with the past in Ethiopia

Pino Schirripa

> Religious misery is in one way the expression of real misery, and in another a protest against real misery.
>
> (Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right", *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, 1844).

1. Pentecostalism and charismatism in Africa

I have been carrying out fieldwork on Pentecostal churches in Tigray, Northern Ethiopia, since 2011. I spent several months in Mekelle, the capital of Tigray, and the surrounding area, interviewing people and attending ceremonies, mainly in the Full Gospel Believers' Church, the first Pentecostal church in Ethiopia. My research is mainly aimed at inquiring the practices and preaching of Pentecostals in an African country where Christianity has been the most important religion since the fourth century AD. In addition, I am studying some specific issues related to the way in which the ideology of social and economic development is forging the discourses and practices of the Pentecostals. In this chapter, I will try to focus on the first issues; my scope is to understand how the Pentecostals represent a difference from the Orthodox Church, which was the first Christian denomination in the country. I will try then to understand the role played by the polemics against witchcraft and traditional medicine in setting up such a difference.

Pentecostalism is currently the fastest-growing Christian movement worldwide, and in recent decades it has spread dramatically both in Western and in developing countries. There is no agreement among scholars about how many adherents there are: estimates of the numbers of Pentecostal and charismatic followers worldwide range from 345 million, which includes 115 million Pentecostals,[1] to higher figures, such as those provided by Barrett and Johnson, who claim Pentecostal and charismatic churches have 523 million adherents.[2]

This divergence regarding membership numbers must be seen within the larger context of differing interpretations of the phenomenon. On the one hand there are those scholars who define the Pentecostal movement in a narrow sense, counting among its ranks only those churches that, in one way or another, can be traced back to the historical experience of Pentecostalism and hence to its roots in Los Angeles in the early twentieth century. At the very most, they include those churches that have been established thanks to the work of individual Pentecostal preachers. On the other hand, there are those who consider Pentecostal and charismatic movements and churches as different, albeit part of the same current.[3] They tend to group these movements together with those historically diverse experiences that can be generally defined as charismatic. Particularly in recent decades, starting from 1960s, charismatic movements are widespread among all established Christian denominations, whether Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant. Often these groups refer back to the experience of Pentecost while maintaining various differences with respect to classical Pentecostal churches.[4]

This classification is even more complex and multifaceted if we consider the African continent[5]. Here, together with the two aforementioned currents, there are additional elements: the independent African churches. These have usually been founded by African preachers who have left one of the mainstream churches originally founded by Western missionaries and preachers. They have adapted the biblical message to the diverse African contexts, giving rise to many syncretistic doctrines. These churches are generally well-established in the continent and date back to the colonial period. They have also attracted the attention of many scholars for their links, at times indirect, at times more marked, with anti-colonial struggles.[6] These churches are still active throughout Africa, and their doctrine and

their practices often intermingle with those of Pentecostals. Nowadays, rather than talking of independent churches and Pentecostal churches, scholars prefer the more general label of Pentecostal and charismatic churches (PCC) to indicate a single phenomenon that cannot be separated; any attempt to do so would make it impossible to provide an analytic account of the current dynamics of such movements.[7]

From what has been argued so far, it is clearly problematic to propose any classification in absolute terms regarding these churches. Pentecostalism and charismatism are not discrete and distinct phenomena, and one can find movements which are difficult to define as either one or the other. This is the position taken by those who refer to all Pentecostal and charismatic movements as a "range of Pentecostalism", highlighting the fact that there is a continuum of experiences between them.[8]

This is an additional reason why I am in agreement with Anderson "[...] I am in agreement with Anderson's inclusion of some independent churches as well as some groups within the mainstream ones into the Pentecostal range." There is a "Pentecostal attitude" currently growing in all mainstream Christian churches as seen in the charismatic renewal in the Catholic Church, Orthodox renewal movements and the Pentecostal-like groups in Protestant churches. All these groups, while still part of mainstream denominations, claim a different, more direct, relationship with God without ecclesiastical mediation. At the same time they adopt most of the Pentecostal features of worship.

In recent decades the dramatic spread throughout the world of Pentecostalism, in whatever form we may classify it, has been a focus of research for many scholars. Anthropologists, theologians, sociologists and historians of religions are carrying out research into this phenomenon, either by focusing on individual churches or attempting to emphasize the transnational dimension of the movement and its growth. In such research, scholars have also created interpretive categories that subsequently have been used more widely in the field of social studies. As Birgit Meyer emphasizes in a critical review of research into African Christian movements:

> «Ever since African Independent Churches became a central research focus for anthropologists in 1960, their churches have not only formed

fascinating research locations but also have been major sites for more general theoretical reflection and innovation in anthropology».[9]

To some extent it still happens now. The current debate on Pentecostalism attempts to understand the main reasons for its increasing appeal and growth. The answers proffered may differ greatly depending on the disciplinary and theoretical approach adopted by the various authors, and they cannot be summarized here. Many scholars, however, stress the flexibility of Pentecostal discourse, which allows the churches to deal easily with different social and cultural contexts and adapt to various cultural traditions.[10] On the other hand, scholars have also pointed out that the spread of Pentecostalism has coincided with the expansion of market economies and neoliberalism.[11]

The structural adjustment processes that have occurred in Africa since the early 1980s have had a direct impact on national economic structures. At the same time they have had many effects on the institutional structure of African states. Naturally they have worsened the daily lives of millions of individuals, increasing the incidence of poverty and reducing chances of access to resources. The withdrawal of the state from different sectors of the economy and public life has meant a significant reduction in the services provided. This is immediately visible in various areas such as transport, infrastructure and, above all, in the health sector.

This rolling back of the state has profoundly changed the African landscape, giving rise to the emergence of new social actors. The upsurge in the private sector has brought to the fore new types of entrepreneurs, both local and transnational. These, however, are only a part, albeit an important part, of the overall scene, where both old and new actors occupy a prominent place. By the former I am referring, for example, to charitable organizations that have worked in Africa for a long time and that now occupy the space abandoned by the state in various care sectors.

Also the churches, both mainstream and Pentecostal, are now occupying places and fulfilling roles left empty owing to this process of state withdrawal. Schools, nurseries and hospitals are directly managed by the churches, which are now occupying an increasingly important position in providing services for citizens. Schools and hospitals are also two of the main symbols of development, owing to the values that are generally assigned to them. Indeed, this is a way for churches to promote themselves

as agents of development and modernity. It is, however, important to stress that if modernization is carried out by religion in this way, the link between modernization and secularism is undermined. Any analysis of the spread of Pentecostalism in Africa therefore needs to take this kind of dynamic into account.

As many scholars have stated, Pentecostalism, especially in its "prosperity gospel" version, promotes a perspective, and even an ethic, which is close to that of neoliberalism. Wealth is a sign of the benevolence of God, a gift given by God to true believers. This perspective encourages the Pentecostal faithful to wear fancy clothes, to drive luxury cars or to have the latest mobile phone. These commodities are not seen as sinful but as a sign of divine grace. In this way the desire for commodities marries Christian ideology; Pentecostalism endorses the desire to access goods that is a mark of the neoliberal world.[12]

In this respect it is opportune to recall a conversation between Achille Mbembe and Jean Comaroff, where the African philosopher stresses how desire is one of the prominent phenomena in postcolonial Africa, together with uncertainty:

> «I would add that structures of temporality in colonial and post-colonial conditions are thoroughly entangled with the vicissitudes of the affective, with the subjective play of desire and uncertainty. In such contexts, we can only refer to the abstraction of time as a rhetorical figure».
>
> «For many people caught in the vortex of colonialism and what comes after, the main indexes of time are the contingent, the ephemeral, the fugitive, and the fortuitous radical uncertainty and social volatility».[13]

Desire, uncertainty, the ephemeral and the fortuitous are more than just signs of the times. They are the conditions in which Pentecostalism, in one way or another, affirms itself. This is also due to the malleability of its discourse and the doctrines and the forms with which it constructs new subjectivities.[14] Most certainly, part of its growing appeal lies in its ability to provide a response, often a radical response, to these conditions.

One of the key elements in the growth of Pentecostal churches is connected to its fight against witchcraft and to its therapeutic activities. In almost all churches there is a day devoted to deliverance from any evil spirits haunting members of the congregation and, more generally, to healing believers of any sort of sickness. Such therapeutic activity is central to the churches, and through it they gain new members, attracted by the hope of having their health restored.

2. Rupture and continuity in African Pentecostalism

One further issue merits more detailed discussion before turning to the specific context of Ethiopia: some general observations need to be made regarding rupture and continuity in Pentecostalism in Africa as a whole. Pentecostalism is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon which is difficult to reduce to a single line of interpretation. If one looks at its history, one can see how composite it is, and that there are also ritual and doctrinal differences between individual Pentecostal churches. Moreover, it is difficult to classify the movement from either the social or the political point of view. On the one hand it is presented by scholars as the religion of the emerging urban entrepreneurial classes in Africa. This is certainly true, and many researchers have focused on this point, emphasizing, as mentioned above, the link between ethics and the Pentecostal spirit of neoliberalism. On the other hand, we must not forget how, in Africa as elsewhere, Pentecostalism also attracts the poor. It is the religion of the poor of the urban areas, not to mention the most deprived rural areas. Pentecostalism has indeed attracted the emergent, dynamic components of society, but its promise of otherworldly salvation, as well as better living conditions, also appeal to the poorest in society.[15] Its very flexibility meets the needs and responds to the hopes for a better life of different groups.

Many scholars have also noted that Pentecostalism has different and occasionally contradictory approaches to various local traditions. On the one hand, there are those who insist on its tendency to make a break with the past, while on the other, there are those who emphasize a tendency towards continuity.

Surely Joel Robbins is right when, talking about the paradoxes of change and continuity in the interpretations of Pentecostal spreading, he writes:

> «When you put the two paradoxes of global Pentecostalism together, you have a religion that localizes easily yet claims to brook no compromise with traditional life and that at the same time seems to have at its heart a set of globalized practices that often look very local in their makeup».[16]

This dual aspect requires investigation, as it is also central to the Ethiopian context.

The idea of breaking with the past seems to be consubstantial to Pentecostalism. Ever since its founding moment, in Azusa Street, Los Angeles, in 1905, the main tenet for believers is that of being "born again". To be "born again" means to have passed through the baptism of the Spirit, whose main figure is the speaking in tongues which might be see how its concrete evidence. The term "born again" is used because the experience determines a radical transformation of the individual. It involves a break with his/her previous life experience and implies a reconfiguration of subjectivity. The experience of baptism of the Spirit clearly marks a rebirth of the person.

Birgit Meyer explored the idea of such a break in a well-known article.[17] In discussing her fieldwork among Pentecostals in Ghana, she showed that breaking with the past should involve not only the individual dimension but also others. It can be seen as a threefold break affecting the individual, the family and the historical dimension. It is individual because once converted, people break with their past habits: they stop drinking, smoking and stealing and desist from worshiping traditional gods and dealing with the occult. It affects the family because, after conversion, believers rely on a new community and a new family: that of fellow church members. It is also historical in the sense that conversion means a break with traditions and, more generally, with the past, a past that is seen as part of family history (his/her ancestors) and a broader past that includes the history of the African continent. The past of the continent implies paganism, and this is interpreted as the cause of current poverty; it is only when Africa is free of the ancestral sin of paganism that it will be able to develop.

The break with the past thus means a break with extensive family ties and with the moral duties connected with tradition. Finally, there is the complex transformation process of individual subjectivity. This involves both a change in behavior through renewed personal morality (the rejection of alcohol, drugs, dishonesty etc.) and a new attitude, especially as regards the perception of self; converts no longer see themselves as outcasts, but as individuals who, thanks to divine protection, can become victors.

This emphasis on the break with the past should not make us forget that, in many ways, Pentecostalism retains some elements of the local cultures where it takes root, despite the fact that it is also a transnational and global movement. Such continuity is a sign of its flexible idiom and its ability to adapt to different contexts.[18]

This scenario can be found in various African contexts, for example in Ghana, where the Lord's Pentecostal Church has in some way assimilated traditional gods by transforming them into demons.[19] This demonization of traditional gods has its origins, however, in the work of those missionaries, especially Protestant, who vilified local deities. To put it briefly, missionary sermonizing, following on from St Paul's demonization of Roman deities, managed to equate traditional gods with the devil of Christian tradition. In this perspective, traditional gods did not merely cease to exist; according to the missionary they were still active, but their activity was considered demonic.[20]

Nonetheless, mainstream Christian denominations continue to make this equation while encouraging a general downgrading of traditional beliefs, considered as superstitions that must be eradicated. Again referring to the situation in Ghana, Opoku Onyinah has this to say about the practice of exorcism among the Pentecostal prophets:

> «Whereas the missionaries saw the gods and witchcraft as "paganism", they regarded the people's fear as superstitious and thus failed to deal with it […] the African prophets directed their messages against these powers and demonstrated the power of God to overcome them through the driving out of spirits […] while the missionaries drew a line of demarcation between Christianity and the traditional belief and practices, the prophets did not».[21]

Therefore, while the traditional gods had already been identified with demons by earlier missionaries, the process became more marked in the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.

Once again this shows how flexible the Pentecostal idiom is. The preservation of the devil of traditional ontologies allows Pentecostals to engage with various contexts and provides them with a language suited to broader social problems. As Joel Robbins observes:

> «[Pentecostal churches'] preservation of indigenous spiritual ontologies and, most importantly, its continued ritual engagement with the spirits that populate them distinguish it from other forms of Christianity and from other globalizing projects, such as development. Through such preservation, P/c avails itself of local meaningful idioms for talking about the past and about the current social problems – for spirits always are a language for talking about broader concerns».[22]

The same thing is highlighted by Dena Freeman with regard to a rural area of southern Ethiopia, where Pentecostalism is spreading quickly. Based on her fieldwork among the Gamo, she argues that one of the strengths of Pentecostalism lies in its exorcism rites, through which Pentecostals cast out traditional gods. Orthodox Christianity as well as Protestantism had, in fact, denied the existence of such deities. On the contrary, Pentecostalism, through the very ritual of exorcism, reaffirms their existence and presence while proclaiming the superiority of the Christian God.

> «In the rural context it was the power that the Pentecostals and their God appeared to have over the local spirits that initially began to interest more people. The Protestant beliefs of the Kale Heywet [the Baptist Church] did not, at this time, accept the existence of the spirits, and thus seemed blatantly ridiculous to most people in the villages. Their ontology was so fundamentally different that it was hard for most villagers to take their message seriously. Their preaching did not address local people's concerns and largely fell on deaf ears. But the fact that the Pentecostals acknowledged the spirits, and at the same time appeared to have superior powers that could banish them, was an

> altogether different proposition, and one that has been central to the spread of Pentecostalism globally».[23]

Although it is not possible to give an unambiguous response to this issue and it is clear that the demonization of traditional African religions started with the mainstream churches following the model of St Paul's attack on paganism, Pentecostalism appears to have added a new element. Traditional religion is not deprived of superstition. The emphasis is not on the factuality of traditions but on the greater power of the Christian God[24]. As Dena Freeman states, the fears that people have of witchcraft and of the work of traditional gods are taken very seriously by Pentecostals. The devilish actions of witches and traditional gods are constant and pervasive, and this explains the exorcisms that take place once a week in all the Pentecostal churches, involving the whole congregation. Pentecostalism thus provides a greater element of continuity compared with traditional religions. Devilish acts are a constant presence, and believers, and above all pastors, have to call on the superior power of Christ to oppose them.

The Pentecostal dual emphasis on continuity and rupture is thus an extremely complex phenomenon and, as such, should be analyzed in each of the individual contexts in which it occurs.

In this chapter I intend to focus on just one issue: how Pentecostalism can represent continuity but also a break with the past in a region where Christianity has ancient roots. This issue requires a brief overview of the historical development of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia and its relations with the Orthodox and Protestant churches.

3. Pentecostals in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is unique among the countries of sub-Saharan Africa in that it has an ancient Christian tradition. In fact, Christianity arrived in Ethiopia in the fourth century AD,[25] and 41% of the country's population currently belongs to the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia.

Although the Orthodox Church is the major Christian denomination in the country, there has been a rapid growth of the Pentecostal movement. The data reported by Haustein and Fantini show that, in the last three population censuses, the number of followers of the Protestant and

Pentecostal churches almost doubled. Estimated at around 1% in the early 1960s, membership of Protestant and Pentecostal churches has gradually risen. This increase became exponential after the fall of the Derg and after the new government allowed, for the first time in the country's history, a considerable degree of religious freedom. While 5.5% of the population was Protestant or Pentecostal in the 1982 census, it rose to 10.2% in 1994 and to 18.6% in 2007; that is, there are now almost 14,000,000 believers.[26]

In the Ethiopian census data, Pentecostals are grouped together with members of the Protestant churches. This is not just a statistical classification, as lay people in Ethiopia normally refer to both as 'Pente'. This label has a particular history which I will discuss later.

To a certain extent, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish Pentecostal from Protestant worship. Haustein makes an interesting comparison between Sunday service in two churches, one Protestant and the other Pentecostal:

> «For my first Sunday service, I went to a church which I will call "church A" for the moment. […..] The worship service itself, however, was less spectacular in comparison to many other churches I had visited. The building filled to barely half its capacity, and the singing seemed rather subdued for Ethiopian conditions. People only clapped their hands when asked to do so, nobody prayed in tongues, and spontaneity was rare. When a number of deacons were invited to come forward to pray, a woman from the choir erupted into ecstatic praise; the deacons waited patiently for her to finish, but nobody in the church followed her lead. During the sermon, there was no spontaneous crowd response; and the service ended without one of the typical altar calls. Two weeks later I visited quite a different church, let's call it church B. […]. The singing was highly energized and loud, with spontaneous bursts of praise and tongues, as it went on for about an hour. The preacher introduced his sermon with a warning that he would have much to say and needed everyone's patience, and in the following forty-five minutes he presented an array of bible passages and contemporary tales, all centering on his theme to joy in Jesus"».[27]

This might seem to be a description of the average Protestant and Pentecostal churches. As Haustein points out, the surprising thing is that church A is Pentecostal and church B is Lutheran. As he stresses, this scene can be explained by the dramatic spread of charismatic currents in mainstream churches throughout the world. In Ethiopia, however, this is also due to the strong links between Protestantism and Pentecostalism, links that are based on a specific history.

Ethiopian Pentecostalism did not come into being as a result of the missionary labors of preachers from America, the birthplace of Pentecostalism. They came late to Ethiopia, and Pentecostalism actually arrived in Ethiopia through Finnish and Swedish missionaries in 1951 and in 1959, respectively. These were followed by other African preachers.[28] Almost 100 years before this, earlier Swedish and Finnish missionaries had introduced Protestant churches to the Horn of Africa.

The evangelical work carried out by the Protestant missionaries, especially the SIM (Sudan Interior Mission), was not easily accomplished due to the hostility they provoked in the emperors, especially Yohannes IV and Menelik II. This hostility was due to the fact that after the conquest of the southern regions, they wanted to establish the Orthodox Church as the National Church in order to consolidate national identity. Many people were forced to convert, abandoning their traditional religions.[29]

In many ways, this situation prompted the growth of Protestantism, especially in the aforementioned southern regions. In fact, subjugated groups saw in Protestantism a viable alternative to the Orthodox Church. While imperial authority encouraged conversion to Christianity and persecuted traditional religions, converting to Protestantism was to become a Christian in a way that distanced imperial power. They abandoned traditional gods but did not embrace the National Church.

In addition, the imperial policy of alliance with the Orthodox Church, which was the state religion, restricted the areas where it was possible for Protestants to preach and proselytize.

The Pentecostals thus arrived in the country in the 1950s, although their rise should also be viewed in the context of Haile Selassie's efforts to modernize the country. In many ways Pentecostalism was mainly an urban phenomenon at the beginning, involving young people, especially university students, from both mainstream Protestant churches and the Orthodox Church. The Ethiopian Pentecostals themselves insist, however,

that Pentecostalism is a phenomenon arising from within, from a need to live their faith in a different way.[30]

Whatever the origins of the movement, Pentecostals were relatively quickly grouped together with Protestants by lay people, who saw both groups as Christian denominations of foreign origin. Pentecostalism encountered the same difficulties experienced by Protestantism in proselytizing because imperial law assigned specific areas to non-Orthodox Christian denominations for missionary activity and for preaching, while other areas of the country remained completely closed to them.[31]

When the 1974 military coup deposed the emperor, the situation changed for Pentecostals. At first, the new communist-oriented government, commonly known as the Derg,[32] declared the separation of church and state. In addition, in an initial phase it tried to limit the influence of the Orthodox Church, which was accused of being an ally of imperial power and partially to blame for Ethiopian backwardness. The Abune of the Orthodox Church was deposed and then executed, and his place was taken by a monk who was sympathetic to the junta. While the Protestant and Pentecostal churches refused to take a direct part in political life, they were not completely hostile towards the new regime, hoping for a climate of greater religious freedom.

The situation changed in 1978 when the government announced a cultural revolution on the Chinese model. Pentecostals and Protestants were severely persecuted, and many leaders and followers were arrested or deported while foreign missions were forced to leave the country. The term ‘Pente’ took on negative connotations; while it was still valid for denominations of foreign origin, now it also gave the idea of foreigners working against the country. “All evangelical Christians had been grouped under a standard name *pente*, which in the discourse of the Derg carried the accusatory meaning of hater of the revolution and the nation”.[33] In this period, united by persecution, Pentecostals and Protestants strengthened their ties, and today they belong to the same council of churches. This link is also felt by society at large, and even today the term ‘Pente’ includes both Pentecostals and Protestants.

The victory of the 1991 revolution marked a new phase, and the new government declared religious freedom. From the end of the Derg to the present day, the country has been ruled by a coalition of parties set up by

the liberation movements that defeated the regime, with the Tigray People's Liberation Front enjoying hegemony in the coalition.

Ethiopia is now a country characterized by rapid growth, and its infrastructure has been transformed. Above all, it is its cities that have profited from this economic progress. Although the coalition which overthrew the Derg was Marxist in orientation, it is now open to a market economy. It draws inspiration from the developmental state, a model that implies, however, strong state-driven economic development.[34] While the state is very much present in key sectors of the economy, the private sector is growing rapidly, especially in the cities. Space for private companies and for individual initiative is increasing even in areas such as health and education. Similarly, neoliberal rhetoric, which is dominant in most of the continent, is also pervasive in Ethiopia. As in the rest of Africa, narratives on wealth and witchcraft flourish.

4. Two stories regarding the occult

At this point it is useful to discuss two short narratives regarding the role of the occult. These have been chosen from the many that were collected during my fieldwork in Ethiopia.

The first concerns a man, Al Amudi, who is considered the richest person in the whole country. There are many rumors about him and the origin of his wealth. One of them claims that he knows a certain magic that allows him to miraculously take possession of the money that pilgrims offer when they leave Mecca, and this forms the basis of his wealth. It is also said that in order to appease demons and increase his riches, Al Amudi regularly performs human sacrifice. He supposedly sacrifices children at night under the tree in the lobby of the Hilton in Addis Ababa, one of the hotels in his possession.

The second tale was told to me by a friend in Mekelle. He recounted that not far from Mekelle the police discovered a horrific crime: a mother had killed her son in order to obtain money. The woman had gone to a *debtera* to discover how she could acquire money quickly. She was pregnant at the time, and the healer told her to wait until the child she was carrying was born; she then had to kill it and put it through the machine used to grind pepper. The pulp obtained then had to be spread all over the floor of her

house. The mother followed these instructions, but kept the baby's head, which she subsequently buried. The police found it and arrested her.

The stories presented here are not very different from the many that are told across the African continent. Stories of wealth obtained through deals with the devil, often involving the killing of human beings, and even family members, are present in the ethnographic literature of various countries. The presence of the devil, and the practices that this involves, is pervasive, and such stories can undoubtedly be heard in both urban and rural contexts.

In many ways, they represent an extension of the conceptual framework of witchcraft. As many anthropologists have noted, the canons of how witchcraft is represented in classical anthropology are no longer sufficient to account for phenomena associated with the occult.[35] Witchcraft was generally interpreted as a mechanism for maintaining social equilibrium, a moral discourse on society, and a misfortune, to quote Evans-Pritchard (1937). Scholars studying witchcraft in different parts of Africa have observed that the practice has taken on new connotations. It is no longer an anti-social force or a regulatory mechanism. In the cities, above all, witchcraft now means dealing with the occult. It is associated with a rapid means of acquiring wealth at the expense of others and is exercised by the help of traditional healers or through a direct deal with the devil. In this context, traditional religion and its practices are translated into the Christian idiom in terms of evil. Most Pentecostal preaching throughout the continent works on this new meaning of the traditional identified as the demonic.

I would like to reflect on how occult practices and traditional medicine are considered by Ethiopian Pentecostalism. Given its ancient Christian heritage, the case of Ethiopia would appear to be different from that of other African countries.

This fact is often recognized and hailed by Ethiopian Pentecostals, who insist that there are strong cultural differences between them and other African Pentecostals. During my fieldwork, many Pentecostal people I have interviewed stressed this point.

The main difference is due precisely to the Ethiopian Christian past, which is contrasted with the pagan past of the rest of the continent. This means that Pentecostalism in Ethiopia has its own distinctive features. How indeed is this conceptualization of the occult configured? Furthermore, is there a narrative that illustrates the break with the past, and how is it actuated? Specifically, it is the break with the past that is a strong element

of Pentecostalism in the rest of the continent. In the rest of Africa, the break with the individual past and, more generally, with the history of the country, is one of its most significant features. Breaking with the past means renouncing sin, but it also means breaking with the pagan cultural heritage by accepting God and rejecting the devil, with whom the pagan past is identified. However, where there is no such pagan heritage, where Christianity is ancient, what are the concerns of Pentecostalism? This question needs to be answered in three points that regard the demonization of traditional medicine, the controversy with the Orthodox Church and the demonization of past persecution.

5. Demonizing as a way to make a break with the past

Let us start with the final point. As I have summarized earlier, to a certain extent Pentecostalism and Protestantism have a similar history. The persecution and common struggle for religious freedom that they have in common has created close ties. Even those who are not Pentecostals or Protestants recognize the strong similarities; indeed, as mentioned earlier, both Pentecostals and Protestants are known by the umbrella term of 'Pente'. I must emphasize here the struggle for religious freedom, because in my opinion it is precisely upon the memory and the narrative of this struggle that the demonization of the past has been constructed. The persecution and the martyrdom it entails bear witness to the difficulties of this period. The fight for religious freedom, however, is not seen as a fight for an ideal; on the contrary, it is a struggle to affirm the words of Jesus. Religious freedom is functional to the possibility of celebrating Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

This is clear if we look at the Pentecostal accounts about the persecutions. Tibebe Eshete and Haustein, in their books on the history of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia, quoted different accounts from Pentecostal fellows centered on the persecutions suffered under Haile Selassie and Derg's regimes.[36]

As I said earlier, under Haile Selassie the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was the state religion. In 1967 the Full Gospel Believers' Church, the first

Ethiopian Pentecostal church, submitted an application for registration as a religious association under the Civil Code of 1960. After a few months the application was rejected.

In the following years, members of the FGBC continued to gather for worshiping and to gain members. In 1972 the police arrested some members during a meeting. These are two examples of the persecution suffered by Pentecostals under the imperial regime. In other parts of the countries in those years there were riots against Pentecostals. It is interesting to look at the Pentecostal accounts about those episodes. Even though the role of imperial government is underscored, they tend to regard the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as the main responsible for the persecution.

> «The underlying narratives strongly rely on a fundamental antagonism between persecutor and persecuted. This is why is necessary to determine the actual persecutor, in most cases the EOC, and to strongly delimit the persecuted community as well as any political contacts between the antagonists. Such persecution narratives may be framed in different ways, either as systemic conflict between freedom and repression or as the story of God's supreme intervention against worldly resistance».[37]

All the narratives seem also to insist on the idea of a common goal: the fight for religious freedom and justice, which is denied by the government and the Orthodox church. It is a fight sustained by the "Holy Spirit fire". It means that the political fight for freedom is immediately transposed onto a religious and metaphysical level. The fight for religious freedom thus became a way for spreading the Holy Spirit in the mundane world.

Although the revolution in 1974 promised religious freedom, the Derg regime after 1978 increasingly persecuted the Protestant and Pentecostal churches. The persecution was even more severe than under Haile Selassie. Many leaders were arrested, tortured and even killed. The churches were closed and their lands confiscated. Pentecostal and Protestant worshipers were forced to hide and to worship in secret, often sharing the same spaces.

Paradoxically in those years the churches experienced a growth. New members came, especially after 1985, when the Derg regime opened the country to foreigner NGOs, which were often Christian.

> «According to informants, the Evangelical churches experienced growth mainly after 1985. The most likely explanation for that were the relative relaxation of the Derg, the coming of Christian NGOs to start relief and community development projects, and the maturity and enhanced position of the church through the accumulation of experience».[38]

Haustein quoted in his book an account form Bekele Woldekidan, who gives an interpretation of the persecution from a Pentecostal point of view that is relevant for my analysis:

> "God may let painful things happen on earth if they are conducive to his plan of salvation, since he is more concerned about people's heavenly life than their short earthly one […]. As a result of the violent decades of the past, the stage is now prepared for revival, more so than it was before the revolution".
>
> With Bekele this persecution narrative flows into an all-encompassing story of divine judgment and redemption, which as such mirrors and reverts the totality of the Derg's oppressive power. While much of the suppression suffered by Derg is left unspoken or de-historicized, it is precisely this somewhat hidden and iconified totality of persecution which drives an overarching master narratives that integrates the Derg's brutal realities into a meaningful tale about the revolution that also speaks the final word on Haile Selassie's reign as well as the church today.[39]

This narrative is found also in other accounts. What I would like to stress is that it is a narrative of persecution as well as of redemption. The persecution and the martyrdom are functional to the redemption. This is why those who oppose this struggle, the emperor, the Derg and the EOC, are portrayed as demonic. In Ethiopia there is no paganism, and the demonization of the past is built on more overtly political grounds: the fight for religious freedom. Such a demonization of the past, rooted in politics, is also present in the Ethiopian and Eritrean churches in the diasporic context.[40]

We now move on to the second point, the demonization of traditional medicine. Firstly, it should be emphasized that Ethiopia is a multifaceted country with a very complex story. The present fieldwork was undertaken in the northern part of the country, in Tigray. It is one of the four traditional kingdoms of Ethiopia; it is an area where Christianity is ancient and where local cults have been incorporated into the practices of popular Christianity for many centuries. This is clearly reflected in the therapeutic practices concerned, which are extremely varied in Tigray.[41] Popular practices are linked to others that are more characteristic of the Orthodox Church. Furthermore, there are figures who, while having a role in the Orthodox Church, also carry out therapeutic practices linked to the occult. One of these figures is the *debtera*.

The *debtera* actually holds one of the lower ranks in the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church and plays a specific role during celebrations. Besides this religious function, the *debtera* often has a therapeutic role. The *debtera* acts as a healer outside the church and is viewed with suspicion by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Indeed, as Allan Young rightly points out, the *debtera* is an ambivalent figure.[42] He makes use of spells, does business with other *debtera*, and knows how to use herbs for medicinal purposes. It is widely accepted that some of the *debteras* deal with the devil or evoke demons for assistance in their activities.

In one of the stories on the occult I summarized earlier, a woman goes to a *debtera* for obtaining riches through the work of the devil. It is a master narrative one can meet throughout all Africa. Through the work of the occult a person can get money, but it is demonic money. On this relies most of the Pentecostal rhetoric against witchcraft and occult. As the story demonstrates, it is a rhetoric also spread in Ethiopia.

Although a member of the Orthodox Church, the *debtera* also works with the occult, and this explains the suspect they provoke among the Church hierarchy. The same accusations are made by the Pentecostals, who argue that the therapeutic and magic powers of the *debtera* come from the devil. In the Pentecostal accusations we can find something more. By putting a *debtera* as a character of the story, the Pentecostal rhetoric, to a certain extent, pushes the Orthodox church along with the work of the occult.

We now come to the third point, regarding the demonization of the Orthodox Church. It is necessary here to refer to a specific therapeutic practice, one that is officially sanctioned and officiated by the church. In

Ethiopia, sources of holy water (*maichellot*) are common; in Mekelle alone there are 12. These are managed directly by church personnel. Normally, the use of holy water and of the mud that is found at the sources is deemed beneficial for any type of disease, as well as a means of dealing with or preventing other kinds of misfortune. The water and mud are not sacred because of a ritual officiated by a priest; the holiness of the water, from which its therapeutic power derives, is the result of divine intervention without any human mediation. The holy water is both hierophanic and theophanic.

The holy water cures every disease because its healing power comes directly from God, and those who rely on it rely on God. One must have faith to be healed. For this reason, those who decide to treat themselves with holy water very often interrupt every other kind of therapy that they were previously following. This is even true in the case of diseases such as HIV-AIDS; in the latter case, those who turn to the holy water sources suspend their ART treatment.[43]

In addition to holy water sources, priests make use of other therapeutic instruments. One of these is also based on the use of water, but in this instance it is water blessed by the priests themselves. In such cases the water is not holy because it originates from a holy source, but thanks to the action of a priest who through a prayer makes it holy. This water is known as *mai* (water) *digam* (invocation).

During my fieldwork, many Pentecostals claimed they do not go to the holy waters, relying mainly on the therapeutic practices of their own church for their physical and spiritual problems. They claim that the power of the holy waters is not divine but diabolic. It is the power of the devil that makes them effective and he makes use of *maichellot* to mislead people and distance them from the true faith. Whoever goes to the holy waters has turned away from God. Arguing that the *maichellot* works through a devilish principle leads Pentecostals, in fact, to demonize the Orthodox Church. The holy waters are managed by Orthodox priests, so they too, like the *debtera*, are linked to the devil. Controversially, Pentecostals have explained the therapeutic activity of the Church as the work of the occult.

Another reason for controversy between Pentecostalism and the Orthodox Church regards the Bible. The Orthodox Bible is indeed different from that of Pentecostals and other Christians. In fact, it consists of 81 books rather than 66. The Pentecostals, and in this case the Protestants too,

say that these books were added after 960 AD when Queen Gudit persecuted the Christians, and pagan elements were introduced into church worship. In short, Orthodox Christianity is criticized for being contaminated by paganism, thus refuting its true Christian nature. These two controversies locate Orthodox Christianity alongside the pagan and the demonic.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that Ethiopian Pentecostalism has its own distinctive characteristics that must be linked to the particular historical dynamics of the country. These characteristics are reflected in the different form in which the faith is preached. Where Christianity is ancient, it is necessary to recast the break with the past, and demonization thus takes place at a more directly political level.

As elsewhere in Africa, anything to do with traditional religion is classed by Pentecostal discourses as demonic. In this case, however, the Orthodox Church itself is put on the same level as that of traditional religions. This is represented by the ambiguous figure of the *debtera* who, although a member of the Church hierarchy, is seen as someone who has dealings with the devil. Even Orthodox therapeutic practices such as the *maichellot* are open to the similar accusations: the Orthodox Church itself can be seen in terms of the demonic.

Notes

1 Johnstone and Mandrik (2001).
2 Barrett and Johnson (2002).
3 For example, Anderson (2004). In his book discussing the diverse origins of Pentecostalism, he clearly counts among Pentecostals, or among its initiators, preachers such as William Wade Harris. From 1914 to 1915 this great African preacher covered stretches of the coastal areas of the Ivory Coast and the Gold Coast (the former under French colonial rule, the latter, the present-day Ghana, under English rule), and he converted nearly 400,000 people before being arrested by the French colonial authorities. Many African independent churches in the two countries were markedly inspired by his preaching and his personality. From a morphological point of view, some elements of ritual and doctrine recall the Pentecostal experience, but from a historical point of view, and also considering their cultural and doctrinal framework, it is difficult to recognize these churches as Pentecostal. They belong rather to the tradition of African independent churches that arose through the individual work of African preachers who had been influenced by the missionaries. On the career of William Wade Harris, cf. Haliburton (1971); Schirripa (1992); Dozon and Augé (1995). On independent African churches and their relationship with Pentecostal churches, see Meyer (2004).
4 See Hollenweger (1972); Csordas (1994); Synan (1997).
5 On Pentecostalism in Africa, see, for example: Comaroff (2009); Corten and Mary (2001); Corten and Marshall-Fratani (2001); Freeman (2012); Kalu (2008); Gifford (1998); Marshall

(2009); Maxwell (1999); Meyer (1999); and Van Dijk (1995), to name but a few.

6 Lanternari (1960).

7 See Meyer (2004).

8 Anderson (2004: 10).

9 Meyer (2004: 447).

10 See Robbins (2004); Csordas (2009); Mary (2000).

11 See Coleman (2000); Comaroff and Comaroff (2001); Comaroff (2009); Gifford (2003); Meyer (2007).

12 See, for example, Gifford (1994); Marshall-Fratani (2001); Meyer (1995); Smith (2001).

13 Shipley, Comaroff, Mbembe (2010: 658).

14 Marshall (2009).

15 See Naso (2013); Robbins (2004).

16 Robbins (2003 : 224).

17 Meyer (1998).

18 Robbins (2004).

19 Schirripa (1992); Meyer (1999).

20 Meyer (1999).

21 Onyinah (2012: 111).

22 Robbins (2004, 129).

23 Freeman (2013: 237).

24 It should be added that in the last decades there has been a different attitude toward exorcisms, also in the mainstream churches, both Protestant and Catholic. It might be due to the charismatic turn within them.

25 The Ethiopian Orthodox tradition claims that Christianity reached the country during the fourth century AD. It was brought by two Christian Syrian sailors who were shipwrecked on the Abyssinian coast. They reached the kingdom of Axum and converted both king and court. After that, Christianity was well established in the country through the work of some priests known as the Nine Saints.

26 Haustein and Fantini (2013: 150).

27 Haustein (2011*b*: 45).

28 Tibebe Eshete (2009); Haustein (2009, 2011*a*).

29 Tibebe Eshete (2009).

30 Haustein (2011*a*).

31 In 1955 a decree of Emperor Haile Selassie provided the legal basis for the work of the Christian missions. These were, however, already operating in the country. On the basis of the decree, missions could, in addition to charity work and socio-economic activities, also proselytize. Nonetheless, this was only possible in certain regions of the country, which to this effect was divided into free zones and those for just the Orthodox Church.

32 The coup overthrew the emperor, who was later murdered in prison, and established a military regime. After a period of internal clashes, Haile Mariam Menghistu became lead of the regime and imposed a dictatorial government. His leadership became notorious due to the two campaigns known as the white terror and the red terror, during which thousands of Ethiopians were imprisoned and murdered by the regime.

33 Tebebe Eshete (2009: 238).

34 Fantini (2013*b*).

35 Comaroff and Comaroff (1993); Geschiere (1997); Moore and Sanders (2001).

36 Tibebe Eshete (2009); Haustein (2011a)

37 Haustein (2011a: 160)

38 Tibebe Eshete (2009: 288)

39 Haustein (2011a: 214).

40 See Costantini in this volume.
41 Schirripa (2010).
42 Young (1975).
43 Cf. Herman 2010.

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6 “*Be Yesus Sh’m*”

Breaking with the national past in Eritrean and Ethiopian Pentecostal churches in Rome

Osvaldo Costantini

The notion of transnationalism figures strongly in the debate about the phenomenon of new migrations.[1] The concept stresses the fact that social, political and economic life is less and less restricted by national and cultural borders, and hence the concept of migration is no longer considered as a series of arrival points, nor a process of uprooting and acculturation, but as a phenomenon that must be related to a broader process in which individuals assume multiple memberships and identities.[2]

Various scholars,[3] entering the debate about the role of religions in contemporary migration phenomena, have highlighted the operational aspects of the Pentecostal movement within diasporic contexts. These authors stress how Pentecostal churches help maintain links, symbolic or otherwise, with homelands (Brodwin 2003; Van Dijk 2012); how they manage their influence on both countries of arrival and departure (Levitt 2003; Saunders 2010); and how Pentecostal language allows people to build a counterimage against stereotypes about immigrants (Brodwin 2003) or to face anxieties and problems deriving from living in a secular country (Bibeau 2012). Finally, they draw attention to the role of Pentecostal churches in negotiating transnational marriages (Van Dijk 2004, 2012).

This chapter draws upon one year of fieldwork among the Eritrean and Ethiopian Pentecostals in Rome (Italy). Here, I will focus mainly on one Eritrean church and its relationship with the recent history of Eritrea, which

is characterized by a nationalist struggle against Ethiopia and the strong involvement of the diaspora in a special kind of long-distance nationalism. Some authors considered this Eritrean diasporic space as an example of a particular form of transnationalism, where deterritorialized links help to maintain a national and territorial identity, contributing to the empowerment of the state.[4] Within this transnational arena, the religious sphere plays an important role (Hepner 2003) in a scenario in which the struggle for identity involves various elements and mobilizes various practices and symbolic resources.

My specific purpose is to stress the various ways in which the discourse about personality, society and the past, is elaborated in this diasporic Eritrean Pentecostal church, underlining flexibility and the local expressions of spiritual notions.

As I will show, this church is a place where, on the one hand, Eritreans try to define themselves beyond political issues, and, on the other, new and old hostile relationships between groups are reabsorbed in the religious language. It is a place where the followers of the church negotiate their past identities. As will become clear, this negotiation is mainly performed through the language of healing and demonic action. I intend to underline the strong rhetorical dynamic operated by the Pentecostal language relating to sickness and the occult. This language allows them to create an alternative space inside the diaspora. However, before proceeding with the presentation of data, it is necessary to present a brief historical picture of the Eritrean population.

Guerrilla and diaspora: Sixty years of Eritrean history

Decolonization and independence

Contemporary Eritrea consists not only of the ethnic groups inside its national borders but also of people living in diaspora, who make up around a quarter to a third of the national population (Hepner 2011). This diasporic flow is one result of a historical process that has its roots in the time shortly after World War II. In 1952, after Italian colonization and a brief period of

British Military Administration, the UN decided to incorporate Eritrea into the Ethiopian Federal State. As a federal region of Ethiopia, Eritrea preserved decisional autonomy over not only internal affairs, but also juridical, executive and legislative matters.[5] "By 1961, however, all emblems of this autonomy, including Eritrea's flag, its National Assembly, and the use of Tigrinya in schools and public places had been co-opted or banned, and Eritrea was forcibly annexed to Ethiopia" (Hepner 2003, p. 272).[6] In the same year nationalistic and separationist turmoil inside Eritrea gave rise to the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), founded in Cairo in 1961 by an exile group. The front arose mainly among Muslims living in the lowlands of the country and reproduced within itself some of the conflicts existing between Muslim clans (Hepner 2003). Internal sectarianism led to the creation of several streams from which the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) arose in the early 1970's.[7] This new front adopted, more strongly than the ELF, ideologies of Maoism and Marxism-Leninism, presenting itself as "a secular, African, anticolonial, class-based movement with rural roots that opposed all imperialisms and sectarianisms" (Hepner 2009, p. 45).[8] After the separation of the two fronts, a violent civil war erupted between them. The EPLF gained the upper hand and brought the country to independence in 1991, formalized in 1993 by popular referendum. The following year the EPLF became the only ruling party to change its name to the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (Woldemikael 2011, p. 1).

During the 30-year war of independence, a sizable number of Eritreans went into exile: both those persecuted by the Ethiopian government because of their support for the guerrillas and those involved in the civil war between the two fronts, who found refuge in other African countries (mainly Sudan) and the West.[9] Precise data as to the number of Eritreans who fled abroad at this time do not exist, because in those years they were registered as Ethiopians. However, by the end of the last century, the Eritrean population abroad was estimated at about one million people (Al-Ali *et al*. 2001, p. 583; Hepner 2011, p. 115), a quarter of the original Eritrean population. It was a diaspora characterized by a strong engagement with the politics of the homeland and was focused on the building of the Eritrean nation (Conrad 2006). After independence, the Eritrean state recognized that participation and involved the diaspora's members in the

process of state building (Hepner 2008, p. 483; Hepner and O'Kane 2011). The main financial support for the war of liberation came from Eritreans living abroad, through many channels functioning as a funding system (Al-Ali *et al*. 2001). Furthermore, in the early years of independence, the process of building the Eritrean state itself was supported in the same way: Eritreans in exile paid a tax consisting of 2% of their annual salary (Mezzietti and Stocchiero 2005). The state building process was stopped by the sudden war between Eritrea and Ethiopia (1998–2000), which was sparked by a border issue in the Badme area (Negash and Tronvoll 2000).

New diaspora, transnational politics and the role of religious institutions

The latter phases of the war have sparked a mass exodus of Eritreans from the country. This process did not stop with the end of the war and continues today. They continue to leave the country because the Asmara government, fearing another Ethiopian aggression, has decided to maintain the military organizational set-up, despite the ending of the war.[10] Military service remains compulsory and unlimited,[11] and citizens between the ages of 18 and 40 are recruited into the Eritrean Defense Force and National Service indefinitely.[12] Every day, some of them decide to flee the country, leaving Eritrea to seek refuge in Western and other African countries.

Tricia Hepner (2003, pp. 272–278) stressed how the religious institutions have played in the past, and are still playing, an important role in filling the empty space left by the decreasing importance of the secular associations in the Eritrean diaspora. Part of Hepner's focus was on Pentecostal churches, which, although remaining autonomous and uninterested in creating an administrative and comprehensive body, nevertheless create links between all "born-again" Christians through evangelism, informal networks and an "all-encompassing discourse of salvation through Jesus Christ" (*Id*., p. 280). Eritrean Pentecostals reject some "sinful" behaviors like drinking, smoking and, above all, being involved in "politics" (*Id*., p. 281). In this way, they build a space in which their religious identity comes before the national (and nationalistic) one, maintaining a link with Eritrean culture while at the same time rejecting mere nationalism (*Id*., pp. 280–1).

In the next sections, I will highlight how the Eritrean Pentecostal group I analyzed falls within the dynamic described by Hepner by the use of Pentecostal language relating to sickness and the occult.

Ethiopian and Eritrean Pentecostalism and the Habesha[13] church in Rome

Historical notes on Christians in Eritrea and Ethiopia

Pentecostalism creates a universally shared language while being able to adapt very well to local concerns.[14] In this language the notion of 're-birth' in a new life by baptism is one of the main ideas of the Pentecostal idiom – for this reason they are also known as 'born-again Christians'. As Birgit Meyer (1998) notes, this allows Pentecostals to create a break with the "past" or "tradition", which is considered as devilish.[15] This discourse, as stressed by Brodwin (2003), must be carefully analyzed because it allows people to represent the "mundane world" as a "fallen world"", demonizing a set of practices and ideas from which a Christian should separate him/herself. Pentecostalism in Africa is strongly linked with this idea, which allows the believer to reject "traditional religions", which are regarded as demonic (Meyer 2012, p. 48).[16] At a more general level, this idea allows them to criticize a cultural framework because, as Marshall-Fratani well notes,

> this demonization of the past is less about the contemporary threat that traditional religion poses in terms of religion competition (unlike Islam) and more about its connection with a cultural past that failed to provide the moral grounding for a "good society" in the present.
>
> (Marshall-Fratani 2001, p. 87)

In this way, through a selection of elements, the Pentecostals build a new discourse about individual and collective identity, as well as about the whole history of the group, through religious language.[17]

The classical Pentecostal rhetoric in Africa based on rejecting traditional religions and all kinds of nonPentecostal religions, which are considered demonic (Marshall-Fratani 2001, pp. 87–88), finds an obstacle in the Ethiopian and Eritrean area, which, unlike other African countries, became Christian long before the colonial period. Indeed, the Eritrean and Ethiopian region is the part of Africa where Christianity is most ancient. Although it is hard to establish exactly when the process of Christianization began, it may date back to the fourth century, when the Aksumite kings adopted Christianity as their religion.[18] Ethiopian Christianity came from the Egyptian (Coptic) Orthodox Church (Lundström and Gebremedhin 2011, p. 85), with which the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahdo* (oneness) remained attached until 1959, when Haile Selassie I decided to nationalize it (Eshete 2009, p. 16). This tradition is grounded on the Monophysite doctrine, which was condemned by the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) (Cortonesi 2009, p. 35). It professes the unity of the divine and human natures of Christ (Eshete 2009, p. 27), which should be considered "distinguish[ed] but not separate" (Lundström and Gebremedhin 2011, p. 87). Despite the formal attachment with the Egyptian Coptic Church, the Ethiopian *Tewahdo* church developed its own theological-liturgical corpus of traditions and practices. Politically, we should note the strong involvement of the church with the Ethiopian State (Eshete 2009, pp. 18–19).[19] As to the beliefs and practices, it should be briefly mentioned that the Ethiopian Church has its texts (the book of the miracles of Mary and the Stories of Saints, which are part of the local Bible) and a specific corpus of therapeutic practices: the *Tsebel* (holy waters)[20] and the *debtera*'s prayers. As Schirripa clearly explains (*supra*), these elements (texts and therapeutic practices) are used by Pentecostals in order to represent the Orthodox Church as linked with the demonic. I would add that Pentecostals also use an old idea that is a hallmark of the Protestant tradition: they criticize the custom of worshiping saints and the Virgin Mary. Generally speaking, Pentecostals refer to a broad range of practices in which worshiping "idols" (saints and the Virgin Mary), healing by holy waters (*tsebel*) or the *debtera*'s prayers, and reading additional text added to the Bible by local theology are considered to be demonic practices. As will become clear in the following pages, Eritrean Pentecostals in Rome add to this picture their political tradition, which, by ignoring Jesus and focusing too much on political issues, is considered to be responsible for the current problems of war and "forced migration". Hence, on the one hand,

Pentecostalism recovers the traditional evangelical criticism of orthodox ideas about the saints and their role as intercessors, which is considered a sort of idolatry,[21] and consider orthodox cures as demonic (or witchcraft). On the other, they add that to criticism of "political issues", considering them together under the label of a "wrong past" that should be abandoned.

Ethio-Eritrean Pentecostal church(es) in Rome

In Eritrea the population is divided between the Orthodox *Tewahdo* Church and Muslims (both about 45%), followed by the Catholic Church and the *Kenisha* (the first Evangelical Church in Ethiopia).[22] In Rome they follow their denominations, except for the *Kenisha*, which is absent from the city, though it is present in Milan. I should add something here that will become important in this chapter: almost all kinds of associations, churches, bars, etc., are distinguished between "Eritrean" and "Ethiopian". There are two orthodox *tewahdo* churches, one for Ethiopians and another for Eritreans.

The Ethio-Eritrean Evangelical-Pentecostal movement in Rome originated in the 1980s[23] and stems from the work of a man who is considered the founder of *habesha* Pentecostalism in Rome. He was formerly an Eritrean Catholic priest, *abba* (Father) Tesfalidet Woldemariam, who believed in personal salvation through Jesus Christ and in the action of the Holy Spirit. After various events, in 1991, a man named Benito Serra arrived from Ethiopia as a displaced person. He is an Italian-Eritrean who grew up in Asmara and graduated in Addis Ababa, where he later worked as a builder and where he "received the Lord" (meaning he became Pentecostal). He grew up under the spiritual guidance of Haile Woldemikael, one of the founders of *Mulu Wengel.*[24] For these reasons, Benito was probably the right man to guide the church. Indeed, it should be remembered that, in 1991, Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia after a 30-year struggle. In that period one might suppose that a man who was born in Eritrea of an Italian father and was Ethiopian "by adoption" would have been considered suitable to guide a church in Italy constituted of the two groups, Eritrean and Ethiopians, who were separating in their homelands following a long war. In 1992, Benito received "the calling"[25] to be a pastor of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Rome (now called Church of Rome), a position that he still holds to this day[26]. The Eritrean

church in Rome grew from an internal schism of that church. Through the church network, a man called Estefanos Mekonnen arrived in Italy in 1999. He was an evangelist (*Wenghelawi*) who decided to found an Eritrean church in the Tigrinya language a few months later. The year 1999 is another critical date in the relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia: it was right in the middle of the war (see earlier). In that period Eritreans and Ethiopians were fighting each other in the homeland because of the border war (1998–2000), and both Eritreans of Ethiopian origin and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin were expelled from the two countries[27]. Eritrean and Ethiopian Orthodox *tewahdo* churches in Rome had already been separated, and Pentecostal churches in Rome started to follow this trend.

They usually say they are separated because of the language issue, pointing to something that neglects the political reasons that the separation stems from. During my conversations with Pastor Benito, I raised my doubts about that explanation: almost all Eritreans, I argued, were able to speak Amharic at that time and, in any case, they had been following worship in the Amharic language until 1999. As the relationship between us became more friendly, he explained that the problem was, on the one hand, the relationship between those two national groups and, on the other, "the 'obsession' of the Eritreans for everything to be 'Eritrean': associations, restaurants and churches". For this reasons, he told me, there had been a period in which Eritreans avoided relations with him because he had not helped to build the Eritrean church, even though he was born in Asmara and his mother tongue is Tigrinya. It is clear that their break was partly caused by the simmering differences between the two national groups.

The Eritrean church:Foundation of prophets and Apostles church

The church founded by *Wenghelawi* (evangelist) Estefanos Mekonnen (today he is remembered as *Pastor* Estefanos) was called *Mulu Wengel* (Full Gospel). Some months later, Pastor Estefanos went to England to preach, and he had a chance to live there, leaving the church of Eritreans in Rome in the hands of an Eritrean refugee who had arrived in Italy in 2002: Tesfalem Teame[28]. Pastor Tesfalem decided to rename the congregation. He now lives in the United States with his family and "preaches the gospel" all

over the world, as he explained during his visit in the church in February 2013. The church is now under his direction, although formally guided by two other pastors and by the group of elders (*shemaghlè*), which includes the pastors. This group manages administrative issues and resolves conflicts between people.

New members are introduced to the church, and they begin to study doctrine (*thm'rti*) under the teaching of *wengelawyan* (evangelists) of the church. After three or four months, they are allowed to be baptized, becoming "born-again" (*Dagm zetewelte*); they explain this by distinguishing two moments of "conversion": the first step consists of "accepting Jesus as his/her personal Savior". According to Romans 10:9, confession in one's own words that Jesus is Lord, risen from the dead, is considered the first and most important act in obtaining salvation. The second step consists of baptism, in which a person will die to the world through symbolic immersion in water, and he/she is then "re-born" to a new life (*addish heywet*) in communion with Christ and free from sin (*atiat*) and the spirit of the devil, which rules the world (cf. Kifleyesus 2005, 2006).

The church is composed of 78 members, but the number of participants changes from day to day. Sometimes 20 people can be found in the church, sometimes more than 50. Almost all members are political refugees who were soldiers in Eritrea, except for three or four members. Some of them are Ethiopians of Eritrean origins who went to Eritrea after independence, though they were educated in Ethiopia and grew up there.[29] There are also Ethiopian members who speak only Amharic, and they too are welcome in the church. They follow the act of worship, helped by a direct translator, and they learn Tigrinya as they go along[30]. People are attracted to the church because of its capacity to deal with daily worries stemming from unemployment, homelessness and problems with integration, but also because of the possibility of deliverance from past affliction: memory problems caused by jail and torture, loss of the sense of being alive, and deliverance from 'traditional' *habesha* spirits and aggression through witchcraft.[31]

They call themselves *menfassawyan* (the spiritual ones), *amantiy wengel* (believers in the gospel) or simply *Kristyannat* (Christians). To be *spiritual* means making a complete break with "the things of the world". In this sense they resignified a terminological distinction present in both the Amharic and Tigrinya languages: the distinction between *Alemawi*

('worldly'/lay, from *Alem* [world]) and *menfassawi* (spiritual, from *Menfas* [spirit]). This distinction could be compared with the English one between 'clergy' and 'laity' (albeit believers): a person who frequents the Orthodox or Catholic church but does not have a role within it is called *alemawi*. In the Pentecostal language this distinction is resignified: *menfassawyan* are all those have "accepted" Jesus as their personal savior, without distinction between the laity and clergy. *Alemawyan* are those who are not yet "saved". Furthermore, in the Pentecostal language, the world (*alem*) is often called *"seytan menghistu"* (Satan's kingdom). Hence, to be concerned about the things of the world or to be an *alemawi seb* (a person of the world) means "walking on Satan's way":[32] there are two ways, the path of Jesus and the way of Satan, with "nothing in between". This is a hallmark of Pentecostalism: rejecting the world and its "unsaved" inhabitants is an important step on the way to personal sanctification.[33]

Breaking with the past, healing history

Here, I would like to highlight how Eritrean Pentecostals use the rhetoric described earlier in order to mediate their identity, redefine their membership and create a social sphere relatively free from politics. According to Brodwin,[34] we should seriously analyze how Pentecostal doctrines build "the fallen World" from which a *kristyan* must be separated.

Eritrean Pentecostals place their national history within the framework of "the sinful world": when I sought clarification on the name of the Eritrean Pentecostal website www.healeritrea.it, they told me that Eritrea is sick and they need to pray constantly in order to heal its sicknesses: war, politics, poverty. In this way the rhetoric of sickness and healing is addressed on "extra-individual" grounds that embrace the past and the recent history of the homeland, a situation that, in their opinion, caused their "forced" migration.

At the end of January 2013 a group of soldiers tried to overthrow the government of Eritrea. Some days later, I was invited to dinner with my two Orthodox friends by a Pentecostal couple. We were sitting on the sofa listening to the Eritrean web-radio where people were commenting on the news and the Eritrean political situation. I was a guest, but the recent events were more important than my presence there: the discussion was going on

in Tigrinya even in the room where I was. One of my nonPentecostal friends was speaking about the need to do something to change the situation in Eritrea. While he was talking, the woman who was cooking started to mumble something I did not understand. After a few seconds, I realized she was invoking the name of god (*igziabier, igziabier amlak*). Then she begun to sing *Alleluya* several times and to call loud the name of Jesus (*be Yesus sh'm* = in the name of Jesus). I asked what she was doing. Her husband explained to me that she was praying … "simply", he added smiling. After 30 seconds, she came to us "counterpointing" her own speech with that of my friend: "We are Eritreans – she said – now we must stand in front of God … because, as Eritreans, we have committed many sins". Some weeks later, I invited them back to dinner, and I asked her to explain her behavior. She answered me in English, starting from the case of the Israelites who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah, for which they were cursed:

> also in Eritrea you could come and see many things and pictures on the walls, and if you put the image of Mary […] they will start to pray and worship her. They also worship Saint Michael, Saint George and who are they? Idols they are … so all these things are the "causes of our bad things". In Eritrea, we did not accept Christianity and for this reason we are forced to leave the country, we have wars, and so on. As Eritreans we should accept Christianity and all our problems will be solved in this way. In 1991 a sister (in Christ), who lived in Sweden, made a prophecy: be careful, she said, because Eritrea is entering a period of darkness … at that time everybody seemed like idiots, screaming, "we are free, we are free".

My informant's narrative proposes two of the central themes of Pentecostalism that I explained earlier: the condemnation of all "traditional" things, which are regarded as the cause of the current problems,[35] and the strong connection between sin and individual and societal evil.[36] She clearly refers to two issues, putting them in the same construction of the "fallen world"": the religious past (saints seen as idols), and the recent history of Eritrea (the prophecy about independence as the starting point of a period of darkness). Above all, we may note their idea of the Orthodox Christian Church as diabolical, using the theological arguments I explained

earlier.[37] However, we should also underline how the category of "worshiping idols" is not only addressed to the saints of the Orthodox Church. In the narrative I proposed before, the category of 'idols' could include something else the woman alluded to: worshiping idols involves both various forms of *habesha* "traditional cults", labeled as witchcraft (*tonquaala*) by Pentecostals, and "worshipping political idols" of Eritrean nationalism: Eritrean flags, nationalistic hymns (*hagerawi mezmur*) and pictures of the president, Issaias Afewerki, sometimes called the "wrong messiah" by Pentecostal people (Treiber 2011), which can often be found on the walls of houses. This construction allows us to look at the Pentecostal construction of the 'fallen world' as a form of political criticism.

In the case I quoted, the woman invoked the name of Jesus during my friend's political speech: invoking the name of Jesus is considered a necessary action in order to face any problem. This has a precise cosmological connotation: almost every problem has spiritual roots, as it is caused by demons. Starting from this interpretation, every believer has the "authority" to cast them out. In this sense, it is very interesting that she invoked Jesus against a political discourse, because this means that she considers it a spiritual problem.

Furthermore, it should be noted how Pentecostal discourse allows women who speak to challenge Eritrean nationalism on symbolic grounds: in the interview with the woman I quoted, she spoke about a prophecy made in 1991 ("In 1991 a sister (in Christ), who lived in Sweden, made a prophecy: be careful, she said, because Eritrea is entering a period of darkness … at that time everybody seemed like idiots, screaming 'we are free, we are free' "). It is no ordinary date, but a sacred one in the Eritrean national (and nationalistic) calendar: it was the year of independence (*natznet*), formally confirmed by a referendum in 1993 (with 99.8% of votes). A sort of myth about independence and the generation of fighters has been created.[38] It was the highest point of the historical period defined in Tigrinya as *gezie qalsi* (the time of the struggle), and anyone who fought in that period became known as *y'keaolo* (the one who can), which has become a term used to refer to an entire generation of fighters (*tegadelti*). The prophecy talks about darkness in post-independence Eritrea and, challenging that nationalistic construction, it condemns the "false joy" of that period ("at that time everybody seemed like idiots"). We might note that it shows the capacity of

religious language to challenge nationalism not only in behaviors, but also on symbolic grounds, undermining its main points.

This becomes clear during Independence Day, May 24, a day on which the Eritrean Community in Italy organizes an official celebration with special guests from Eritrea. Participation in this event is considered an important sign of loyalty to the regime (Woldemikael 2011, pp. 1–5), and, for some years now, both in Rome and other Western cities, the new Eritrean refugees organize a "counter-celebration" that brings together all opposition groups. The Eritrean Pentecostals went neither to the celebration organized by the association considered pro-regime nor to those organized by various opposition groups. Among nonPentecostals these are days of long discussions about which celebration should be chosen. On that day, Pentecostals explained to me that they went to church, praying for Eritrea, because independence and all political things concern the past and its "politics", from which no good can come and which can only lead to wars, poverty and forced migration. As I have said earlier, the religious language is able to challenge Eritrean nationalism on the level of symbols, practices and representations. It is possible to insert these narratives from my field notes in a context of opinions, practices and rumors (whether or not in a mystical or magic-religious vocabulary) and expressed by social actors, in my ethnographical experience. The "challenge to nationalism" seems to be fostered by typical Pentecostal rhetoric that "engages with the 'history of the present', questioning the social, political and cultural forms that they see as historical grounds for the present crisis" (Marshall-Fratani 2001, p. 88).

My fieldwork shows a social space in which a supernatural etiology is found for human things, which points to a spiritual discourse that is able both to analyze the historical events, making sense of them in a religious framework, and to propose a solution: the conversion of all of the *habesha* people. As I outlined earlier in the woman's narrative, they also propose spiritual solutions to historical concerns. In an Eritrean bar, one of my informants explained to me that the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia (1998–2000) erupted because of the abandonment of Christianity by *habesha* people, above all by Eritreans, and because they were too involved in political issues:

> and in 1991 we gained freedom and people started to not follow Jesus Christ […] and then in 1997 [1998] that war with Ethiopia came to us

> […] listen, I think this: people are not following Jesus Christ and then this is the result: wars, closed churches … I think so.
>
> (B., 27 years old)

As Mulugoyta told me at the main railway station,

> Eritrea has a curse and the problem of my country is the culture: people love to be separated, they love to fight, they don't reach *hariennet* [freedom]. […] Even with Ethiopians we are so proud, we look at them in a way that means "I am Eritrean, ok?" and they only want to have good relations with us […]. The problem, you know, is spiritual: they worship idols and then God sent us bad things. But Eritrea will soon accept Christianity and will become a new country: everything will be good.
>
> (Mulugoyta, 23 years old)

The pastor of the church, who has an Ethiopian-Tigrinya wife, once spoke about the possibility of there being a curse in the Ethio-Eritrean region, and for this reason there would always be war. The interpretation based on the curse was followed by a version that puts the focus on the fallen nature of the *habesha* culture, in which "there is not Jesus", as Milly explained to me:

> Just after my conversion [in Italy], I participated in a competitive exam. Among the themes I could choose to develop, there was one about the resolution of the conflicts. So I thought to choose that because I was born in a place in which there is always war. I found the answer: Jesus. When you have Him you cannot do evil to others, you are not worried about having more than others (as we have been doing since that time). I had been looking for an answer for a long time, and it was simply Jesus. He changes your inside morality […]. When I was born in Eritrea there was war [struggle for independence]. After that I went to school and there was war [struggle for independence], and after I did the war [1998–2000] and military training for six years. I ask myself: why do

> we have the war? Because they didn't know that Word, the Word of God. If you know the Word of God, you are not allowed to make war.
>
> (Milly, 35 years old)

These two interconnected interpretations of the fallen culture and the transposition of the *historical negativity* into otherworldly terms,[39] operating in the languages of the curse and demoniac action in the world, result in only one possible solution for that historical 'sickness', which includes the bad relationship with Ethiopians: total conversion. Indeed, in those interviewed that I quoted there emerges another important issue: the relationship with Ethiopians. On this ground, too, Eritrean Pentecostals try to "break with the national past": an Eritrean pastor from England came to Italy in order to celebrate his brother's marriage. He made a speech about those issues:

> I would have a solution for those bad things. The separation between Ethiopians and Eritreans is meaningless [*turgum yeblun*][40] if all of us convert to Christianity and we hold each other's hands in order to worship Jesus. We would solve all kinds of conflicts and separations, because with Jesus all differences are not important.

Inside the Pentecostal church, many discourses address themselves to this break with a "past full of hatred and division". Once I was talking with Ethiopian followers of the Eritrean church, and they explained to me that old issues of nationality and provenance were no longer important because they were all in the same Kingdom of God.[41] During this conversation an Eritrean who had been involved in the 1998–2000 war told me how "the hatred" had left him:

> I was in that war … I hated Ethiopians because they were our enemies. After I accepted Jesus I got to know, here in Italy, many Ethiopian pastors who held conferences in that period: they were all good in a spiritual sense … and now we are with Jesus and I like Ethiopia.

These are the elements of the ethnographical context that constructs the ways in which Eritrean Pentecostals in Rome judge a past, which is bound

up in an often-fraught relationship with Ethiopians who are part of the diaspora. They spread a sort of official version in which the reason for the division between Ethiopian and Eritrean churches is considered to be their different mother tongues. In this way they ignore the political motivations behind their separation, though the political issues are recognized by Pastor Benito in his discussions with me, as I showed earlier. Nowadays, among Pentecostals, the divisions and the hostile past between the two groups are mediated through discourses and practices in the churches. First of all, we should note the issue of labeling: it is a matter of fact that Eritrean congregations have their places of worship, while Ethiopians worship elsewhere, and so they are different congregations; because of this, they have to name these congregations in some way. Generally speaking, they choose to distinguish between the "church in Tigrinya" and the "church in Amharinha", and they corrected me when I addressed them as Eritrean and Ethiopian churches. I would stress here that they prefer the 'linguistic label' (Churches in Tigrinya and those in Amharic), clearly rejecting the national ones: as they often tell me, if God's will were done, there would no longer be "Ethiopians" and "Eritreans", but "children of God" living in His Kingdom.[42] Furthermore, based on this "new membership" in the Kingdom of God, there is, currently, an important change in behavior among Pentecostals: Eritreans sometimes attend Ethiopian churches and vice versa. It should be said that it is pretty rare to see Amharic speakers in Tigrinya churches, because Tigrinya is a language they do not know and that is very difficult to understand, despite their common roots. However, even Amharic people in Rome stress the necessity to build a common church, while respecting the difference between the two languages.[43] Eritrean and Ethiopian Pentecostal churches organize common meetings during the Christian holidays like Christmas, Easter, etc., in which they worship together. In those days, *habesha* guest pastors come from other countries or directly from the homeland.[44] These large meetings go on for more than one day, and they generally worship once in an Ethiopian church and once in an Eritrean one. Finally, it should be added that they are trying to organize an association that would involve both the Eritrean and Ethiopian Churches of Rome, something that would be almost unthinkable elsewhere.

It could be said that Pentecostals neglect all kinds of previous ethnic, regional and national differences, which are obscured by a new membership in Christ, because they consider those issues as elements of the past they

need to forget. In this way the believer opens a space in which the national memberships lose importance. As Hepner argues, the social space opened by Pentecostal churches is relatively free from nationalistic ideology, and individual identities are shaped far away from it. This space is not only rhetorical but in daily life is filled with practices that support and reproduce it.[45]

Conclusion

As Marshall-Fratani underlines, following Appadurai, transnational movements allow groups to bypass or confront the nation-state, leading to erosion of the capacity of the nation-states to monopolize the "communities' moral resources" and to manage political loyalties" (Marshall-Fratani 2001, p. 84). Starting from a definition of transnationalism – "any relation which, deliberately or by its nature, constructs itself within a global space beyond the context of the nation-state, and which escapes, at least partially, the control or mediating action of States" (Badie and Smouts in Marshall-Fratani 2001, p. 81) – Pentecostalism could be seen as one of those movements that allows the creation of new networks that escape, partially or totally, the action of the nation-states. In this way, to be born again is valued above all else by the converted, who can place themselves beyond any loyalties to the nation-state in their identity definition (see Glick-Schiller *et al*. 2006).[46]

As mentioned earlier, Pentecostalism develops a universally shared language that adapts well to local concerns (Robbins 2004). In the case of the Eritrean church I discussed in this chapter, it should be clear how this language allows Eritreans in Rome to live in a social space where they have the possibility to use a transnational identity that goes beyond the national and political ones. In this case, Pentecostals' rhetoric about sickness, demonic action, witchcraft, the past and the sinful world enables them to face old and new hostile relationships.

The Ghanaian Pentecostals analyzed by Van Dijk (2012) included journeys, passports and visas in the area of competence of their spiritual leaders, along with treatment and healing. In a similar way, Eritrean Pentecostals enlarge the notion of sickness and spiritual problems, including in them both the religious and the political past, which is considered to be

the (more or less demonic) cause of all individual and collective current troubles. Pentecostals should fight those troubles through prayer, as in the case of the woman who reacted to the political speech of my friend by invoking the name of Jesus, as if she were faced with some other kind of "spiritual problem".

The rhetorical construction is used to mediate a past that is collectively and individually rejected and in which is comprised relationships between them (Eritreans) and Ethiopians. This construction is able to create a portion of social space where it is possible to resist identity definitions shaped by the Eritrean state and to escape the issues of political membership. The fieldwork shows how transnational flows offer individuals the possibility to give their loyalties to these transnational entities rather than to nation-states.[47] In the fluidity of the situation, one of the motivations that led to the division of the churches was that of nationalistic ideology, into which the churches had been dragged. Later on, this process was, and still is, challenged and mediated through discourses based on the Pentecostal language about avoiding the 'fallen world'" and sin, which should be left alone by *menfassawi* (spiritual man). The abandonment of any kind of past, which is considered as a set of beliefs and practices, labeled as *witchcraft*,[48] spiritual problem, sickness or simply *alemawi negherat* (things of the world), is a way to become *menfassawi*. The spiritual person should not care about politics and national separations, which are things that occur in that 'sinful world' that is regarded as responsible for the current situation; he/she does not get involved in the 'traditional' cult, which includes the Orthodox *Tewahdo* Church that Pentecostals consider sinful and linked with darkness. It might be noted that the church creates a new individual who is able to face his/her past, to make sense of it, and, finally, to try to break with it; they love to repeat: an Eritrean should abandon the ways of sin and witchcraft (which include politics and Orthodox practices) in order to become a spiritual person.

Notes

1 See Bava (2011, p. 498); Glick-Schiller *et al*. (1995).

2 Glick-Schiller *et al*. (1995, p. 48); Levitt (2003, p. 848). See also Appadurai (1996); Hannerz (1992).

3 Bibeau (2012); Brodwin (2003); Levitt (2003); Toulis (1997); Van Dijk (2001, 2004, 2012); Vasquez (1999).
4 Al Ali *et al*. (2001). See also Hepner (2003, 2008, 2009).
5 Negash and Tronvoll (2000, p. 9); cf. Araya (1990, pp. 87–88).
6 See also (Bernal 2004, p. 7); Zewde (2001, pp. 219–220).
7 Calchi-Novati (1994); Hepner (2003, 2009).
8 Cf. Bernal (2004, pp. 7–8); Calchi-Novati (1994); Johnson and Johnson (1981).
9 See Bernal (2004); Johnson, Johnson (1981); Kibreab (1996).
10 As to the incapacity of the new government to move on from the ideology of the independence and the struggle, see Reid (2005).
11 Cf. Müller (2011, p. 63).
12 Hepner and O'Kane (2011, p. xxviii); Riggan (2011a, pp. 72–73).
13 The term "habesha" describes Tigrinya and Amhara populations, and is the local name that the English "Abyssinian" comes from.
14 Cf. Robbins (2004); Maxwell (2006).
15 A social dynamic that was also noted by Vittorio Lanternari (1988) about the difference between syncretic churches and Pentecostal ones.
16 The debate about the relationship between Pentecostalism and witchcraft/"traditional cults", is large and complex, touching several different points. Specifically, a part of the literature is focused on the question of continuity and rupture between Pentecostalism and witchcraft. There is no space here to report this debate, and I refer to the literature: Daswani (2010); Engelke (2004, 2010); Kalu (2003); Marshall-Fratani (2001); Mayrargue (2001); Meyer (2004; 1998, 1999, 2012); Newell (2007); Robbins (2004, 2007); Van Dijk (1992).
17 Meyer (2004); see also Schirripa (2008, p. 122).
18 See Eshete (2009, p. 16); Abbink (2003).
19 Cf. Pankhurst (2002). The church managed not only the religious issues, but it also administered the population, through the shaping of the calendar and the management of lands (Hepner 2003). Furthermore, "In the mid-1800s, the Orthodox Church formally aligned with the imperial Ethiopian monarchy under Yohannes IV and began 'divinely ordaining' Emperors as well as exacting taxes on their behalf" (*Id.*, p. 271).
20 Based on my experience, three things are considered tsebel: 1) any water blessed by priests in a place considered being sacred; 2) the soil of a sacred place, melted in the water; 3) grain that a *qeshi* (shepherd) sends to grind and is then blessed by him. *Tsebel* can be drunk by the sick person or can be put on the sick part of the body.
21 See Eshete (2009).
22 See Lundström and Gebremedhin (2011). For the history of the evangelical movement in Ethiopia, see also (Haustein 2011a, 2011b).
23 All the informants are reported here with pseudonyms.
24 See Eshete (2009). The most important Pentecostal denomination in Ethiopia, founded by students of Haile Selassie I University in Addis Ababa (Eshete 2009).
25 In the Pentecostal churches, generally people do not choose pastors: the Holy Spirit, who usually speaks through pastors or prophets, should inspire the decision (see Tronvoll 1998).
26 I got this information from my interviews with Pastor Benito and other field sources. However, during my fieldwork, another Ethiopian pastor in Rome published a short account in the Amharic language of the story of the *habesha* Pentecostal movement in Rome. I have collected much information from that and other local Pentecostal magazines.
27 According to Human Rights Watch (2003), there have been about 75,000 deported Ethiopians of Eritrean origin since June 1998. Eritreans of Ethiopian origin were expelled from the country after independence (1991) (Riggan 2011b), and there are approximately 70,000 of them (Human Rights Watch 2003). See also Hepner (2011).

28 I consulted an Eritrean Pentecostal review, "Elim" (2008), published in Sudan by Eritreans, in order to collect information about Pastor Tesfalem and his biography; an interview with him is published in the issue of February 2008.
29 In Eritrean, they are usually called Amitche. On this issue, see Riggan (2011b).
30 It happened that other nonEritrean people (Italians, Ghanaians and Somalis) came to church, and they were re-addressed to their national churches. With Ethiopians, this does not happen, and they underline that this is important.
31 The church offers deliverance from *Zar* spirits (see Malara 2011; Mercier 1986; Vecchiato 1993; Young 1975), from Buda attack (a sort of evil eye with particular characteristics) and other forms of "witchcraft" (about Tigrinya etiologies of sickness in various languages, see Bruni 2010; Villanucci 2010). The church shares a typical Pentecostal discourse about generational healing: the cause of individual problems could be found in his sin or in the life of his ancestors. In this case, he/she has to be delivered from this generational evil.
32 However, they distinguish between who is "controlled" by the Spirit of the Devil and who is "possessed" by any demon (*ganyen*). This difference is not simple, and there is no space here to explain this question.
33 See Droogers (2001). See also Brodwin (2003, p. 89); Eves (2011); Hollenweger (1972).
34 Brodwin (2003).
35 Marshall-Fratani (2001, p. 87); see also Maxwell (1998, p. 353; 2006, p. 10).
36 Among Pentecostals, the cause of the sickness is often the sin (of the believer) that opens doors to demons that cause the sickness (see Schirripa 2012).
37 See also Schirripa *infra*.
38 Cf. Riggan (2011b).
39 Something that the Italian anthropologist called "*destorificazione del negativo*" (de Martino [1959] 2008, pp. 104–109).
40 This expression denotes total disagreement with an argument because of the rejection of its basis (a believer, for example, says that the idea of a world without God is *turgum yeblun*) and to note the absence of an element that is important in something (for example, cooking the *zigny* without red spice could be defined as *turgum yeblun*).
41 On the Facebook accounts of the Eritrean and Ethiopian Pentecostals I met in Rome, they declare "kingdom of God" as their nationality.
42 It should be added here that outside of the Pentecostal people, those national labels are used (e.g. by Orthodox people, by members of several associations, etc.).
43 Some months after I had started my fieldwork, I chose an Ethiopian woman who followed the church as a translator in the Ethiopian. When I met her in order to explain my research, I focused on the issue of Pentecostal healing, and she interrupted me suddenly: "in my opinion you should look at the question of the separation between churches … because that is our sickness". Afterwards, she told me about a vision she had during prayer: the Tigrinya and Amharic churches united to do great spiritual things together.
44 Ethiopia, because in Eritrea Pentecostalism is forbidden by the regime.
45 Personal communication of Pino Schirripa. Fantini (2013) in Ethiopia analyzes a similar dynamic.
46 The issues of identity, transnationalism and nation-state are well discussed also in Geschiere and Meyer (1998).
47 See also Glick-Schiller *et al*. (2006). The emphasis on the membership in the Kingdom of God as a way to avoid the nationalism has been noted also by Maxwell in a different context (2005, p. 15).
48 More than once someone told me that hating and making war on each other are forms of witchcraft (*tonquaal*).

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7 *"I went out into the street … and now I am fighting for my life."* Street children, witchcraft accusations, and the collapse of the household in Bangui (Central African Republic)

Andrea Ceriana Mayneri

Rows of children half-naked or dressed in ragged clothes are crossing the street of Bangui, the capital city of the Central African Republic (CAR). They are children and young people forced to live on the streets by their families or fleeing situations of poverty and unbearable domestic violence. In some cases, these street dwellers have been accused by their own relatives or other adults of being witches[1] and of "mystically" causing diseases and misfortune. They live on the streets in order to avoid torture and executions, which are often applied in cases of witchcraft accusations. They walk with their eyes down, searching for food, or they play, apparently carefree. At night, they hide in empty markets or lie on the pavements of the town center. During the day, they wander around Bangui in search of work, or simply looking for somewhere to play or first aid centers. The street children in Bangui are almost all male. The girls, who are abandoned like the boys, are not about: they are victims of forms of exploitation and marginalization less 'visible', but I will not analyze this phenomenon here.[2]

The population of the city calls these children and young people *godobé*: it is difficult to define the meaning and origin of this word, but the street children in Bangui don't approve the use of the term. The lives of the street

children of Bangui are similar to those of the *schégué*, the street children of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the youths that increasingly populate the streets of Equatorial Africa (De Boeck 2000, 2004; Dugrand 2013; Kahola-Tabu 2014). There are many differences between one country and the other, and it is better to be cautious when we compare contexts with different historical, political and economic backgrounds.

In the following pages, I will introduce, first of all, the historical and social context of the CAR, and I will place the Bangui street children phenomenon in relation to the current political events. I will base my analysis on material collected in autumn 2012 in the capital city of the CAR.[3] These data complete those I collected from 2005 to present, in many regions of CAR (and, more recently, among CAR refugees in Chad) as part of research that also involved the representations of witchcraft and antiwitchcraft violence.[4] In the second part of this text, I will analyze Bangui's street children phenomenon with particular attention to the violence of witchcraft and the way it appears in the daily life of the CAR population.

By commenting on the work of other anthropologists on the same subject, but in other contexts of Equatorial Africa, I will highlight some peculiarities of the CAR case, mainly as they concern the common representations of the urban and family spaces of the Bangui street children.

A history of oppression and dispossession

The CAR is undergoing a social and political crisis whose origin should be sought in the historical dynamics that go back to the French colonization and earlier, at the time of the Oriental slave trade. Throughout the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, the history of the CAR territory has been "a tale of raiding and forced migration" (Cordell 1985, pp. 26). From the boundary region with Sudan and the Chad Basin, entire populations moved towards the south, in order to escape the Khartoumers, slave and ivory traders who were clearing the country of its goods and human resources throughout southwestern Sudan and the Nile area. Later on, it was the Rabih Fadlallah and the Muhammad al-Sanusi raids that decimated these moving populations (Cordell 1985, 1986).

By the end of the nineteenth century, the disposition of the main ethno-linguistic groups was similar to the current one: besides the Nzakara and the Azande kingdoms, the Sango and the Yakoma groups on the Oubangui shores, and the pygmy groups in the southwest, the Banda were populating the center and the eastern territory, the Mandja the central region and the Gbaya the western one. But for the Europeans who were dividing up Africa at the Berlin conference in those same years (1884–1885), this equatorial region represented an *unknown land.* The French took possession of the huge territory they called Oubangui-Chari, over which they had limited control for a long time. Inspired by the model carried out in the Congo by King Leopold II of Belgium, Oubangui-Chari was at first divided between different concessionary companies.

Pietro Savorgnan de Brazza's last mission in Equatorial Africa (1905), and the echoes of the scandals and abuses perpetrated in the colonies, but also the publication of the novel *Batouala* (1921) by René Maran, set in a village in Oubangui-Chari,[5] and of the *Voyage au Congo* (1927) and the *Retour du Tchad* (1928) by André Gide, contributed to revealing the systematic exploitation and annihilation of the native populations built up by the concessionary regime and by the colonial administration (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1972). The administrator and historian Pierre Kalck, who is still one of the few authors to have specifically studied the history of the CAR (1992),[6] defined Oubangui-Chari as "*la plus délaissée des colonies*", the most neglected of colonies (see also Brégeon 1998).

Independence, declared in Bangui on 13 August 1960, was in large measure the result of the efforts of Barthélemy Boganda, the first catholic *abbé* from Oubangui-Chari, a deputy at the French National Assembly (1946), mayor of Bangui and president of the *Grand Conseil* of French Equatorial Africa (1956). Boganda's sudden death in a plane crash on 29 March 1959 is the great "trauma" from which the nation's political life has never recovered. However, Boganda is a particularly complex and ambiguous figure (Burnham and Christensen 1983; Ceriana Mayneri 2014a; Kalck 1995), and the crisis that arose with his death is mostly the responsibility of the CAR elites in the struggle to formulate a political project free of the 'national father' figure and the interests of the colonial and postcolonial *milieu.*

Since independence, the country has gone through many episodes of extreme violence: the CAR is commonly remembered as an example of

dictatorship in which highly violent periods – for example the Central African Empire era (1976–1979) of Jean Bedel Bokassa – shift into periods of pronounced control and coercion. Recently, the deterioration of the political and military situation (Mehler 2011) has led to unprecedented internal conflict, particularly over intercommunity questions, which have brought with them intercommunity interreligious violence. In March 2013, the rebel coalition Seleka, from the northern regions on the border with Chad and the Sudan, entered Bangui, obliging President François Bozizé (who also seized power in 2003 through the barrel of a gun) to escape. Between 2013 and 2015, the fighting and intercommunity violence extended to most of the country. Various military groupings linked to Seleka have continued to occupy and sack vast areas of the territory, clashing with *anti-balaka* "self-defense" groups that assert their own autochthony, are militarily organized and have attacked and decimated the Central-African Muslim communities in particular. International military intervention, which began in late 2013, seems unable to end the violence, particularly in the rural areas. The international community (France, in particular) has insisted on organizing the presidential and legislative elections due in January and February 2016 in a context of intercommunity tension, armed clashes and forced population movement, arousing many doubts from international observers.[7]

I will not analyze here in detail the statistics of one of the poorest countries of Equatorial Africa, afflicted by economic, military and health problems, in which repeated coercive political and social actions have had devastating effects on the future of entire generations. Instead, I would like to draw attention to the country's isolation: in fact, anyone (a CAR citizen, academic researcher, humanitarian operator etc.) who has to deal with this country has, sooner or later, to face the difficulty of explaining that *Centrafrique* is the name of a state and not a generic name for a macro African region. To avoid this confusion, it is common to refer – in newspapers but also in specialist publications – to *Centrafrique* as Central African Republic (*République centrafricaine*), or to the acronym CAR.

The streets of Bangui

Bangui is made up of many residential districts, known as *kodro*, built around the center of the town, on the shores of the Oubangui River, which hosts the national and international administrations.[8] Most of the population live at about 10 kilometers from this first zone in an expanding suburban area. These districts/*kodro* are crossed by a labyrinth of dirt patches that flow into the main streets. They are characterized by ethnic homogeneity, cohesion and proximity among the members of the families (Adrien-Rongier 1981, pp. 99–100). As we shall see, this organization has very important consequences on the way street children understand and conceptualize their urban space and life experience.

The *kodro* are the environments where the main formal and informal economic activities are carried on, and where Bangui's main market is located, the huge *Kilomètre cinq*.[9] The markets are the favorite places of the street children, because they can find their jobs and entertaining activities and seek protection. In fact, it is in the empty markets that children go to sleep at night and look for work when the commercial activities begin again at dawn.

It is not easy to estimate the number of children living in the streets of Bangui: in 2012, before the recent conflict broke out, 650–750 children and teenagers under the age of 18 may have been living day and night in the streets. But this figure certainly becomes more than a thousand if we consider the youngsters who, after wandering in the streets in search of food and money, come back home to sleep in their family homes or in some adult's house.[10] The difficulty in estimating the exact number is due to the great freedom of movement enjoyed by the street children. Their life paths are difficult to classify, as the line between 'street children'" (that is, children who live night and day in the street) and 'children in the street' (that is, children who spend the day in the street and come back to their families to sleep) is not a clear one. Bangui's street children are organized in *sections*: itinerant groups of kids of the same age, from small children 4–5 years old to teenagers who are already 18. All of them live in the street, some sleep together, some go back every so often to their families, but all of them feel like members of the same *section.* The connection between these children and teenagers is complex: it is a matter of protection, mutual support and exploitation.

During the day, the *sections* split and reform according to the needs and opportunities of the moment: the children split up in order to find a

temporary job and earn some money, they gather together during the afternoon or evening in places of entertainment (cinemas) or at night to sleep together.

The street children phenomenon challenges the very definition of childhood – whom should we regard as a 'child', a 'teen' or an 'adult'? The "bourgeois conception of childhood (in which the child is nothing more than a fragile being to be protected) and youth (the future class of consumers)" (Biaya 2005, pp. 216) is inappropriate to describe social and economic contexts where, partly for historical reasons, youth is associated with rights and duties that do not correspond to the Western model. As suggested by Comaroff and Comaroff (2005, pp. 19):

> far from constituting a universal category – a social status generated by the abstract sociological principle of generation, youth […] (is) the historical offspring of modernity; modernity […] as an ideological formation […] that casts 'youth' as both the essential precondition and the indefinite postponement of maturity.

In the CAR, childhood representations are constantly changing because of the redefinition of generational rules and power authorities, which have important consequences on the assets and balances of this particular equatorial society. Far from the Western model, both children and teenagers are commonly considered social actors gifted with full capacity of choice and action: thereby, they identify with responsibilities proportionate to the active role they assume within the community. To this, we should add the changes induced by the current crisis: according to the World Health Organization, 40% of the CAR population is less than 15 years old, in a context where the death rate is three times higher than what is defined a "humanitarian crisis".[11] In this context, the younger ones are living in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, they are often capable of acting between the spaces of the formal and informal economy – the *débrouille* (lit. 'one fends for oneself') – to vouch for a life-style made of profits and survival that many adults and elder people don't have and that they are unable to procure for themselves. On the other hand, the young are relegated to the fringes of a society incapable of guaranteeing education, health services or economic opportunities to start a family and are cut loose from their blood relatives. For De Boeck, in Kinshasa today the categories

of ‘youth’ and ‘death’ have become inextricably linked (2016, p. 753). In the same way, CAR society is notably young, but, due to demographic growth, the AIDS epidemic, economic and political conditions, the young generations are structurally fragile. Children and adolescents act in the spaces opened between the suspicions and conflicts that split families and local communities, avoiding the risks and seizing the opportunities offered by old and new ‘religious entrepreneurs’ (who often belong to Pentecostal groups and help spread a persecutory interpretation of misfortune) and by political-military leaders who are tirelessly recruiting for the many military and paramilitary groups.

Although current events show that street children, soldier children and witch children share some similarities, it is mostly the bond between witchcraft and childhood in Bangui that I will consider in the following pages.

Witchcraft violence: Children, adults and religious leaders in the streets of Bangui

An increasing number of children living on the streets of Bangui have been accused of witchcraft by their family, by neighbors, in the Pentecostal churches or by people of other places of worship in the town. Nevertheless, it is a matter of fact that the street children in Bangui often deny being accused. The humanitarian reports from Central-African experts, which have been commissioned in recent years by the Ministry of the Family and Social Affairs, are particularly ambiguous when it comes to mentioning the role of witchcraft accusations. On the one hand, the weight of the accusations directed at children and adolescents is explicitly regarded as negligible (“sporadic episodes” and “insufficient information” are often mentioned, particularly in rural areas).[12] On the other, some experts include witchcraft among the “diseases” to which vulnerable children are susceptible,[13] or explicitly ask the children to indicate the cause of death of their parents, choosing from the options of “disease”, “accident”, “witchcraft” or “other”.[14]

Two observations lead me to hypothesize that witchcraft accusations have an important role in the ‘production’ of new street children: first of all

the comparison with other equatorial contexts, starting with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where, in the capital city alone, the street children are estimated to be many thousands. De Boeck (2005, p. 21), who analyzed the street children phenomenon in Kinshasa, writes:

> Death has become omnipresent throughout the city: in the visible form of funeral wakes (matanga) that transform houses and streets into public sites of mourning and mercy, or in its more invisible form, that of the "second city" (deuxième cité), a shadow city that is constantly present as a parallel world of nocturnal and evil forces and makes its presence felt in the minds and lives of most Kinois, for example in the form of "witch-children"" and street children, considered to be representatives of a "dead society" (société morte).[15]

This oppressive presence, this "second world", is evident in everyday life in the CAR. The *gendarmeries*, the courts and the prisons are thronged with men and women, young and old people accused of having practiced some form of witchcraft: the CAR penal code defines and punishes the crime of witchcraft with very heavy prison sentences (Dankwa 2000; Ceriana Mayneri 2014b; Ngovon 2012). Institutional violence is then added to popular violence, consisting of torture, burning and, probably, disembowelment,[16] and to stigmatization, especially against the socially weaker – children, women, old people – who have no social or family protection net.

As De Boeck writes, "the rise of Christian fundamentalism as propagated by a great number of Pentecostal churches and other 'miracle' churches of spiritual awakening" (2005, p. 12) deeply influences the "intrusion" of the "second world" – with its witchcraft representations and invisible dangers – in the everyday life of Equatorial populations. In Bangui, healing ministries and Pentecostal churches are places in which, almost every day, large deliverance and consultation sessions, led by Pentecostal pastors or self-styled prophets, result in accusations of witchcraft against children. Even in the bosom of the CAR Roman Catholic Church there are figures offering diagnosis by mixing psychology and demonology, insisting on possession and enchantment, and encouraging a search of the "genealogical tree" for

the witch who originated the family's bad luck (Fancello 2012, p. 69). I shall return to this point later.

A second reason that leads me to underline the particularly important role of witchcraft accusations among the Bangui street children is the difficulty and, sometimes, the conscious or unconscious denial these children show in recounting their life experiences. Among the dozens of children and youngsters between the ages of 4 and 18 that I have met, only a few talk explicitly about witchcraft, but some would not describe to their companions in the *section* the events that drove them onto the streets, and many of them told a glaringly tall tale. In this last case, a little theft – sometimes a few hundred francs, less than one euro – caused an excessive reaction from the parents, who beat up the child, leaving him on the street.

This same story can be recorded anywhere in Bangui among the street children, and this is why I presume that it is a stereotyped tale that hides an unspeakable past: the accusation of being witches, of being the cause of the family's bad luck, the tortures and the escape to the streets. I use the word 'unspeakable' intentionally. In Equatorial society, witchcraft is a metonymical word: it belongs to a particular dictionary to express "a moral discourse about actions and human relationships" (Taliani 2012, pp. 603). Talking about witchcraft to the victims or the accusers means using a vocabulary in which every word (witchcraft, mystical, metamorphosis, poisoning, attack, blockage) is polysemous:

> They are magic-religious terms because they talk about the spiritual relationship between what is human and the Other, or the super-human, as well as the bond between the human and the invisible […]. The terms also have a psychological meaning since they describe the border between a livable life and an unacceptable state of suffering […]. They are moral: these terms are actually emic interpretations used to understand the falls, the crises, the collapse of a world of shared values, the attribution of guilt, and the responsibilities of those who created damage, pain and disgrace.
>
> (Taliani 2012, p. 586)

Among the different kinds of brutalities that hide the meaning of witchcraft, the family and sexual ones are the most important. If 'unspeakable' violence

and suffering can be described metonymically by witchcraft terms in the contemporary Equatorial context, it is because witchcraft continues to be the flip side of kinship and proximity (Geschiere 1997, p. 25; 2013, p. xvi).

Etiological crisis and the collapse of the household

In his major work *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Evans-Pritchard established the bond between witchcraft representations and some antisocial sentiments such as hatred, envy and jealousy; he also clearly asserted the possibility of metonymically shifting from these sentiments to witchcraft representations:

> The Zande phrase "It is witchcraft" may often be translated simply as "It is bad". For […] witchcraft does not act haphazardly or without intent but is a planned assault by one man on another whom he hates. Azande say that hatred, jealousy, envy, backbiting, slander, and so forth go ahead and witchcraft follows after. A man must first hate his enemy and will then bewitch him.
>
> (1976 [1937], p. 48)

The work of Evans-Pritchard in the 1930s and the most recent studies on witchcraft are separated by the decline of the "tenacious influence of the structural-functionalist paradigm with its obsession with order and internal integration" (Ciekawy and Geschiere 1998, p. 1). However, the moral dimension of witchcraft has continued to be explored by anthropologists, including studies that, from the late 1980s, have shown how material and spiritual insecurity, social and political changes, and neoliberal economic models can influence resilience and the renewal of witchcraft representations and antiwitchcraft violence, in Africa and elsewhere.[17] The meaning a community gives to antisocial sentiments, such as envy and jealousy, necessarily changes over time. What Marc Augé calls "the transformation in the consciousness of evil"[18] affects most notably the familiar realities of village and kin, exaggerating the "profound ambivalence about intimacy – as desirable yet at the same time frightening – [that] haunts human forms of sociality all over the world" (Geschiere

2013, p. xxii). What CAR society is undergoing is an etiological crisis, "a crisis of cause-seeking", as De Boeck puts it, about Congolese society (2004, p. 160): finding the cause, the reason and the solution of personal and common adversities is always much more difficult; and envy, jealousy and backbiting take on new meanings. Within the family, in the *kodro* and places of worship in Bangui, the success of mystical etiology arises from this widespread insecurity, and it finds in family and interpersonal conflicts a rich soil.

I want to emphasize the difficulty the anthropologist finds in talking to these children and the need to look into their households to find the seeds of witchcraft violence and abandonment. The "family", here and later in this chapter, is meant, as Geschiere puts it, "not as a traditional core but in constantly renewed and especially extended forms" (2013, p. xxvii). During a discussion in Bangui, some local actors who work with street children asked me how to change the present situation, given that "CAR people are totally swallowed up by their own families". This question well expresses the anxiety towards strong family bonds that can "block" personal development – block is the most used word in the witchcraft vocabulary of CAR, and it expresses the inability to fulfill one's personal aims. That is why it is important to remember that

> the churches by promoting and authorising the diagnosis [of witchcraft among children] offer an alternative to the violent conflicts that happen within the families after the accusations of witchcraft. These accusations are not instigated by the churches' directors: they just recognise and legitimate them.
>
> (De Boeck 2000, p. 41)

Family, and especially kinship, can be described as a spider's web in which a person moves to ask for help and solidarity but in which he or she remains blocked, trapped in the meshes of an inextinguishable debt and oppressed by individual and collective expectations that are continually fueled by structural poverty. The work of Alain Marie about individualization processes in Sub-Saharan Africa showed "the shortcomings of community solidarity and the worsening threats of witchcraft sanctioning these shortcomings" (2000, p. 138). In contemporary urban Africa, the debt logic toward parents, lineage and the social surroundings leads to various

dysfunctions: “the apparently spontaneous inclination to sacrifice for the sake of solidarity embodies constraints of debt and the terrorist arsenal of antiindividualist repression guaranteed by witchcraft” (Marie 2000, p. 147). This is what Peter Geschiere (1997, p. 11) calls the “dark side of kinship” and Pierre-Joseph Laurent (2002, p. 113) the “pathologies” affecting social relationships (2002, p. 113). These pathologies emerge in a context of a weakening of the customary concord, in which the state is unable to guarantee basic life conditions to the population.

As in a vicious circle, on one side the lack of means and the repeated failures oblige many young people to seek community solidarity, with the consequence of falling into endless debt with the family and the impossibility of becoming adult. On the other side, the structural multi-crisis devours family solidarity and any chances of surviving – in the CAR, many children and adults scarcely eat more than once a day – excluding and expelling the weakest or condemning them as witches. The generation gap turns into crystallized mistrust and eventually into a clash between “debtors” and “creditors”:

> the debtors, who remain or become insolvent, are bitter toward parents that they consider inadequate or malicious, while fearing their rancour for having made unproductive investments. On the other hand, the creditors feel they have been cheated and dwell on their disappointment at not being repaid by their “children“, or that these “children” have “succeeded” but are “ungrateful”.
>
> (Marie 2000, p. 157)

This is the reason why some authors have usefully interpreted the recent increase of accusations of witchcraft against children as a sign of the dissolution of the gift economy (De Boeck 2000) or, in psychoanalytic terms, as a denial and a reversal of genealogical relationships and solidarities (Yengo 2008).

Conclusion: The dialectic of enclosure and freedom

The family and the logic governing the (dys)functioning of community solidarity are at the heart of the phenomenon, on the rise in the Bangui context, of the street children. The deaths, divorces and second weddings of parents (remarriages) are not enough to explain abandonment and witchcraft accusations, but they are extremely common experiences for street children. As a result, the stepmother or the stepfather become key figures in the witchcraft accusations and in the process that leads to abandonment or the flight of children to the streets. The stepmother (or the stepfather) who refuses to take charge (even emotionally) of her husband's son symbolizes the total breakdown of the morality of exchange within the family or in the restricted community of a district or village.

Childhood, family and kinship are also, obsessively, at the center of the discourses in the Pentecostal churches, and generally in places of worship in Bangui. This is according to a formula that was repeated to me in both a *Ministère de guérison* (Healing Ministry) and a Catholic church: to rebuild "the genealogical tree" of a family suffering cyclic misfortunes, in order to find a family witch, preferably a child or a teenager.

However, family is also a leitmotiv in the conversations or the anguished dreams of the street children. A child in Bangui can resume his own life experience in a few sentences. He will say, in Sango, "*mbi sigi na légé*" to describe his escape or being thrown out of his house: literally, "I went out to the street"; or sometimes "*na kota légé*" (on the big street), to distinguish it from the steps and the paths that run from one house to another. Then he will add: "*mbi lutter na Kilomètre cinq*" (now I fight for my life at the *Kilomètre cinq* market).

Why "going out", and not "go", "achieve", "escape"? And why "on the road" (*légé*), on the "great road" (*kota légé*), and not, for example, in a market where these children also seek shelter and spend most of the day? First of all, it is "out" because they are aware that they have been, previously, "inside" something: a physical space, a community of individuals, a family. For each repetition of the word *sigi*/going out, the family and neighborhood life emerge from the memory of these children and flow into their life stories. Now it is possible to explain their mistrust towards the word *godobé*: the street children in Bangui reject stigma and reification in an abstract category (the *godobé*), disconnected from the society that contributes in a violent way to producing their marginal identity. Though rejected, however, they maintain a link with the

neighborhood and the original kin built around the dialectic of "enter" and "going out", of in and out: having been abandoned and marginalized, these children perceive and define themselves in relation to society, the family, the *kodro* and other inhabited urban spaces. Joseph Tonda (2008, p. 331) writes about the Equatorial belief whereby the witch holds the bewitching substance in his belly:

> It is therefore "bodies in excess", "organic excrescences" that, according to the belief, ensure that the subjects "come out" of their body to go to eat (…) "the flesh of others".[19] This metaphor of the "output", understood as the output from the self, is inseparable from the de-parentalization [déparentalisation], the dissolving of kinship as exit from the relatives, from family, from the "village", from "local" and, even more, from history.

The ultimate shape of this deparentalization[20] is, for Tonda (2008, p. 332), the rejection and criminalization of children by their parents.

Second, these children go out from family and kinship to be on the road, on major roads outside their neighborhoods across Bangui. On the road, children run the greatest risk: disease, drug (notably glue) addictions, adult violence, and particularly the police, who often look for these children, in a grotesque war among the poor, to extort money. Nevertheless, the road is also the site of freedom and independence that poverty or family violence cannot guarantee: according to Tonda, the road is the *non-lieu lignager*, a place outside the logic of lineage, in which this logic is subverted, denied, distorted. You go "out on the street" because this is outside the logic of the lineage that dominates in the *kodro* and along the paths that connect the houses of the same family. The road is different and in some ways the opposite of the steps and paths passing through the houses and "inside" the logic of kinship and closeness; on the road, identities can be discarded and rebuilt, following the track of job opportunities and entertainment venues of meetings and the transit of goods in the markets. The street of the witch children, soldiers and abandoned ones "cuts off" – geographically and symbolically – from family relationships. It is in this new space that children and young people of the CAR, injured in body and spirit, look for new forms of freedom, which often turn out to be fatally intoxicating.

Notes

1 In Sango (the Central African Republic official language) *zô ti likundu*, literally "the person (*zô*) with/for (*ti*) witchcraft (*likundu*)". For further information on witchcraft representations and on the repression of witchcraft in CAR, see Cimprič (2014), Grootaers (2007) and Ceriana Mayneri (2014a) note 15.

2 For a very provisional introduction to the subject of Bangui street girls, see Ceriana Mayneri and Lejard (2013: 43–45). The absence of street girls in Bangui – which in reality is invisibility – should be analyzed under subjugation aspects of enslavementand of abuse (sexual and otherwise) in CAR society.

3 The research in Bangui was commissioned and financed by the NGOs Danish Refugee Council and Triangle-Génération Humanitaire. I would like to thank Thierry Lejard and Noël Innocent Palou for their invaluable help in the streets of Bangui. The analysis and writing-up of the results was carried out during a Marie Curie/COFUND postdoctoral fellowship (2011–2013) at the Laboratoire d'Anthropologie prospective, Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium).

4 Ceriana Mayneri (2012, 2014a, 2014b).

5 In 1921, René Maran, an administrator from Guyana, won the prestigious Goncourt prize for *Batouala. Véritable roman nègre*, which introduced a rough critique of colonization.

6 The work of Pierre Kalck has been the object of various critical observations as to the accuracy of his data: see, for example, the opinion of W. J. Samarin (1975).

7 On the conflict in CAR, see, for example, Käihkö and Mats (2014), Marchal (2015), Ceriana Mayneri (2014c) and the short essays in the online section "Hot Spot" of the journal *Cultural Anthropology*: http://www.culanth.org/fieldsights/538-the-central-african-republic-car-in-a-hot-spot (June 2014).

8 The word *kodro* can indicate lineage, a village and a residence area (Adrien-Rongier 1981, p. 93).

9 Which means that it is located at 5 kilometers from the center of town. During the recent conflict, the market area, where most of the Muslim community of Bangui resided, emptied as a result of the armed conflict and force displacements, becoming an enclave, access to which is protected by the international military forces in the capital.

10 My survey confirms Kengne's data (2005). Other studies by humanitarian groups show figures close to 4,000 or 6,000 children living in the streets of Bangui: but the problem of the criteria chosen to prove these figures and a certain tendency to over-dramatization seem to falsify these data.

11 See the WHO data: http://apps.who.int/gho/data/view.country.6100.

12 "Analyse causale des problèmes de protection des enfants de la rue en Centrafrique", a report commissioned by the Ministry of the Family, Social Affairs and National Solidarity, with the material, technical and financial support of UNICEF (April 2004).

13 "Rapport de l'étude sur la cartographie des interventions en matière de prise en charge des orphelins et autres enfants rendus vulnérables par le VIH/SIDA en RCA", commissioned by the Ministry of the Family, Social Affairs and National Solidarity, with the financial support of Worldfund (June 2010).

14 "Analyse de la situation des orphelins et OEV en RCA" commissioned by the Ministry of the Family, Social Affairs and National Solidarity, with the support of UNICEF (April 2005). An exception is the wide-ranging study produced for UNICEF by Aleksandra Cimprič (2010). For a description of an ethnographic case that apparently contrasts with the data collected in Bangui and in other equatorial contexts, see Nsengiyumva (2010) on Burundi.

15 See also De Boeck (2016, p. 749): “This haphazard city is often referred by [Kinshasa’s inhabitants] as a *cité cimetière*, a cemetery city or necropolis were where the material infrastructure has become totally ‘cadaverous’ (*cadavéré*), and in which life is constantly rhythmed by the inescapable presence of death.”

16 In accordance with the view that witchcraft/*likundu* is a small animal or an organ located in the abdomen of the witches. This type of representation, spread across Equatorial Africa, was already presented by Evans-Pritchard in his seminal work on witchcraft beliefs among the Azande (1976 [1937]). In the same work, Evans-Pritchard discussed at length the practice of the ritual autopsy on the dead body to find out if the deceased had actually witchcraft in his belly. In recent years, in the CAR, I have recorded many rumors about “autopsies” on the body, dead or alive, of alleged witches. This practice seems currently to be widespread in Bangui too, although it is difficult to distinguish between the *mise-en-scène* of some local healers and descriptions that one can pick up among the population and in the national press.

17 Peter Geschiere recently wrote: “This articulation of the local with wider horizons seems to be crucial to the resilience of these discourses [about witchcraft] in the present-day world, despite deep changes” (2013, p. xxvi). I cannot dwell here on controversies regarding the advisability of tying a certain resilience of the phenomena of witchcraft to the changes brought by “modernity”: of the many authors who have dealt with this subject, see, above all, Florence Bernault (2006) and the *mise au point* of Geschiere (2013, pp. 5–13).

18 “Transformation de la conscience du mal” (Augé 1975, p. 236).

19 “La viande des autres” is also the subtitle of the French edition of the book by Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*.

20 For a critical analysis of this concept, see Geschiere (2013, pp. 18–22, 227) and De Boeck (2016, p. 759).

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8 Fields of experience

In between healing and harming. On conversation between Dogon healers and sorcerers

Roberto Beneduce

Healing powers, sacrifice and sorcery on the Dogon plateau

At early dawn on this January day,[1] as always, Donoban, a small compound of the Ondogou community, is swarming with men and women who left their villages during the night and have just arrived. They are sitting and waiting to see Ambainde, one of the most renowned healers in the region. Though past 70 now, he is as watchful as ever that everything is in order where the healing is to take place. Almost all of them have a chicken to offer as a sacrifice.

The messages of Christianity and Islam seem never to have reached Donoban. Since 1993, the year when I first traveled there in the company of Ibrahima Kassambara,[2] practically nothing has changed. When he must heal his patients, Ambainde continues to sprinkle blood on the fetishes and family altars, invoke the ancestors, or sing the slow melodies learned from his father, a famous *binu*[3] of the Dogon plateau. But, for years now, Wahabite Islam has been growing everywhere and is particularly active in the region, and the number of madrasas and mosques goes on increasing. For some time, the economic crisis, drought and desertification, which is gradually reducing the areas of farming land, making daily existence

uncertain, have been driving the young to leave these arid lands. Year after year, even the families living in Donoban see their young leave for the capital or seek work in the Ivory Coast, as happened to Bakari, who left as soon as he became an adolescent.

Meanwhile, there is the usual flurry of hens, sleepy dogs and goats grazing on stubble of millet, while some children, shivering in the harmattan, play as they wait for their millet porridge. But today is a special day. In a few hours, this small compound of no more than 60 people, hidden from the traveler by huge blocks of laterite, will become crowded and bustling, thanks to the most important celebration that takes place there: the annual sacrifice.[4] People from neighboring villages will come too, even though they are aware of the pressures Ambainde has always been under to abandon his fetishes. It is a significant tribute: though, in any case, when they are sick, they do not hesitate to ask his help. A nurse from the dispensary of Ondogou will become a butcher for the day, helping to cut up and prepare the animals after they have had their throats slit.

Ambainde's cousin is busy plastering the walls of the sanctuary that houses the *dege dege* (literally: statuette) fetishes. He carefully smears a thin mortar of the mixture of clay and straw known as *banco* with his right hand, scooping small quantities of it out of his other hand, which has become a sort of bowl from the ankylosis brought on by a serious fracture. Once the walls of the small sanctuary are smooth and dry, Ambainde will decorate the entrance with geometrical designs in white and ochre.[5] The *dege dege* have been dusted down and put on show, one next to the other: they seem like a family, each with its own age, dark wood next to older wood, their worn forms witnesses to the work of time and termites.[6]

Meanwhile, the bodies of the sacrificed animals – chickens, goats and sheep – are being piled up on the area between the sanctuary of the *dege dege* and the little path between the rocks that leads to other houses to the west. Hidden inside the sanctuary, only his hands half visible, Ambainde takes the bleating goats that his cousin offers him, drags them inside the narrow entrance, and, after slitting the throat of one, waits for the next. Every so often, his head emerges, when he wants a rest or a brief chat or to see what is happening outside. The innards of the animals are carefully cleaned and washed by an army of child surgeons, hung on the branches of the trees, and left in the sun.

The enigma of the healing is all in this scene. These fetishes were made to treat sicknesses or give protection from hostile spirits, and they need to be watered with the blood of slaughtered animals if they are to regain the strength that has gradually weakened over time: they need that blood if their action is still to be effective and their strength renewed. His informants gave Griaule (1940, p. 128) a precise metaphor to explain the sense of the sacrifices: "the altar drinks the victim's blood as a child sucks his mother's breast (*tète sa mère*)".

The expression "charged objects", adopted by many authors to define the characteristics of the fetishes (Colleyn 1987), should here be taken literally: partly in the sense of 'rechargeable' objects, just as if they were batteries that need to be regularly recharged if they are to work. "The altar" – wrote Griaule – "is the intersection of power-victim, and, consequently, power-sacrificer" (1940, p. 128). And, with predictable circularity, this power pays tribute to the material economy, the millet harvested or the onions that could be sold in the village markets. The meager yield in the last few years, the scarce rainfall and the hostility these practices meet with in a radicalized religious scenario have made this festival more modest: as the number of participants and sacrificial animals has diminished, so too the power of the fetishes has weakened, and Ambainde is visibly worried.

However, the sacrifice, in the course of which one victim (the animal) takes the place of another (the sick person) is not the only act that occupies the ritual stage. Under the healer's guidance, a further exchange, a further metamorphosis, takes place. By a remarkable act of magic, killing an animal (in Bamanan, the term sacrificer, *murukalatigi*, indicates he who kills, literally he who holds the handle of the knife; Bazin 1986, p. 253) is transformed into healing a sick person, defending the group that lives in this isolated cluster of houses, hoping for an abundant harvest or that the water sources one kilometer away will not dry up. But it is also transformed into a direct attack to neutralize the witches, against whom Ambainde's words and songs launch clear warnings and threats. It is at this precise moment, when the act of killing is converted into an act of healing, while at the same time – as in an invisible chiasmus – the therapist becomes a soldier and the scene of healing becomes one of combat, that the various meanings of the term *pharmacon* suddenly reveal themselves as if in an iridescence. As Hunt remembers, "Healing and harming is a salient pair in Africa's histories, long and brief" (Hunt 2016, p. 12).[7]

How, and by what paths, this double sense of what we call a medicine or a drug has been lost in our language, and why in other societies the pairs 'poison/remedy', 'sorcerer/healer', 'sacrifice (killing, combat, struggle)/healing' cannot be distinguished from each other, is a theme that will only be touched on marginally in these thoughts. However, witchcraft is also the expression of this founding aporia. It could be described as a moral aporia ("ni dos, ni ventre", writes Llouis Mallart Guimera of Evuzok witchcraft and the impossibility of discerning if it brings about acts that are socially reprehensible or legitimate; 1981), as analysis of local representations continues to confirm (in Cameroon as in Gabon or the Congo). The semantic field of the vernacular terms for witchcraft and the metaphors used to evoke it in West and Central Africa clearly express the ambivalence of the powers attributed to it: protection from enemies, protection from bullets and any other projectiles, personal success, wealth or the creation of talents, although the modern forms of witchcraft – *djambè*, *ekong*, *famla* etc. in Cameroon – refer almost exclusively to destructive and negative aspects).[8] The same polysemy and ambiguity are also to be seen in the term medicine, remedy.[9]

This complicity of meanings is revealed by the healer's mask (*dyodyonune*, witness of the healing), described by Griaule (1938, pp. 552–556) as crowned on its topmost point by a small figure "representing the mythical witch"![10]

The myths described by Griaule are still more eloquent: the healer-mask (called a few lines later simply "witch") meets a huntsman in the wood, who is also regarded as knowing secrets and medical cures, and gives him some "remedies" that will enable him to touch fire without burning himself, thus increasing his power. In another myth, the figures of the witch and the hunter actually coincide, but it is, above all, a famous article by Calame-Griaule and Ligers on the figure of the hyena-man in local folklore (1961, p. 117) that reminds us that the healer "can make as many poisons as remedies, and that his is a double-edged (*à double tranchant*) science. […] Magic is *the dangerous side of medicine*, and both can cause good and evil, depending on how they are used. This ambivalence is expressed by the healer's motto: 'father who kills' " (my italics).[11]

If we look more closely at this ambivalence, it does not seem to be limited to the pole represented by the hunter/sorcerer pair. It also applies to

illness, particularly when etiological models are considered and the sense of persecution that these interpretations encourage. Even the sick person's position is structurally ambivalent, without it ever being possible to state definitely whether he is wholly innocent or not. Both when the disease is the price paid for transgressions committed by other members of the lineage and, still more, when the victim himself is regarded as a sorcerer, the shadow of moral undecidability invades the scene of healing from every side. This is the eloquent response given by a healer to Harry West during his research in Mozambique:

> "Many of those who come to see me are not the victims of sorcery […] Many of them are sorcerers". In response to my expression of surprise, he said: "Sorcerers make trouble for themselves […]. The things that sorcerers attack are often protected against sorcery. If sorcerers trip the defences placed around their targets, they can be wounded".
>
> (West 2005, p. 57)[12]

As was noted some years ago by Andras Zempléni (1982, p. 10), traditional medicine can be defined overall, starting from the very logic that moves its various actors, as "an art of the social use of illness", and the intersubjective process underlying the persecutory interpretation of its causes confirms this principle:

> African cures are rarely individual therapies. They are more often complex social processes where what is latently and fundamentally at stake is the regulation of economic, social, legal, ritual or political relations within a group of between different groups. The illness is often the harbinger of an event, a rash on the social epidermis. It gives rise to a collective experience that makes explicit, materializes and, possibly, resolves the much broader difficulties or tensions that are affecting the life of the group. […] Let us say that the sick person and his social partners dispose of shared seed-beds of persecution. They are shared, first of all, because in the societies I am speaking of a persecutory reaction is normal to illness and more serious mishaps, but also to the most banal experiences of conflict, failure or relational tensions.

Zempléni (1990) actually describes some illnesses and witchcraft itself as a principle of "group delimitation". Without stretching his observations too far, we might say that every time a negative event alludes to the onset of a crisis, the undecidability of the powers and forces at stake effectively acts on the social bond, interpellates it and measures its strength to protect it (as during ritual cures and the Dogon sacrifice briefly described earlier, the aim of which was to reinforce social relations and reaffirm the group's boundaries in relation to a hostile environment) or to subvert it.

Archives of disorder, secret and rebellion

There are many reasons for the ambivalence that unites witchcraft, illness and the action of healers in a shared field of experience. Though Zempléni's analysis is confirmed by an extensive literature, something seems to be missing: the need to read the persecutory attitude in Africa in a historical perspective and its 'normality' (Zempléni 1982), not only as a characteristic trait of the interpretative models of sickness in so-called traditional medicine but also as the outcome of a historical dynamic that was and is itself dominated by uncertainty, by dispossession and by the experience of "being acted on by".[13] The stages of this dynamic should be identified and explored, starting from the contemporary generalized proliferation of the "intimate enemy" (Geschiere 2013).

From Cameroon to Mozambique, what distinguishes the healer (*nganga*) from the sorcerer remains a difficult or impossible question to answer, although everyone seems to recognize the former as an ally of the medicine of the hospitals and dispensaries (the 'medicine of the Whites', as it continues to be called), and its professionalization has been encouraged for some time now (Last and Chavunduka 1986). However, the ambiguity of the contours of this field of knowledge goes on fostering mistrust and suspicion, to the point that recent protests at the increased number of so-called ritual murders have seen many citizens of Gabon wondering how it was possible for "sorcerers' apprentices" to have been able to infiltrate the healers.[14] Besides, the expertise and powers that the healers in South Cameroon themselves claim to possess encourage doubts about the nature and confines of their practices (Beneduce 2010a).[15] There is just a thin borderline, constantly crossed in one direction or the other, that seems to

separate them in the ‘world of the invisible’. It is a border that the research of Eric de Rosny (1981) persistently tried to make visible and clear. However, de Rosny was aware that these areas of opacity and uncertainty, which are certainly related to particular representations of illness and healing and local conceptions of power, success and how to achieve it (Ashforth 2000, 2015; Guyer 1993, 1995; Guyer and Belinga 1995; Laburthe-Tolra 1985), had also been encouraged (or, rather, altered) by the language of the missionaries and the interventions of the colonial administration. The uncertainty I am thinking of becomes still more complex when we recognize that the ambiguity of medical knowledge is not a monopoly of the African healer: it was expressed much more dramatically in colonial medicine. This aspect has been most effectively analyzed by Frantz Fanon ([1959] 1965, p. 121):

> Introduced into Algeria at the same time as racialism and humiliation, Western medical science, being part of the oppressive system, has always provoked in the native an ambivalent attitude. This ambivalence is in fact to be found in connection with all of the occupier’s modes of presence. With medicine we come to one of the most tragic features of the colonial situation.

There is a whole hagiographic tradition of the colonial doctor as hero, battling against endemic diseases or working in difficult conditions in the most hostile places, moved by the desire to protect a humanity besieged by disease, prejudice and wretchedness (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992). But this very same figure, during the years of the war of Algerian liberation, carried out false radiographies, administered drip feeds without drugs or was complicit in torture. The state of exception in force in the colony saw a medicine of exception at work.[16] The experience of these contradictions, these scenes of violence and terror or, simply, astonishment, often took the form of rumor and gossip or was turned into stories. White (2000) has described how stories circulating in Equatorial Africa depicted operating theaters as places where cannibalism was practiced. He recalls that in Rhodesia in 1945, an English parasitologist was forbidden to collect blood and feces samples for fear he would be thought a vampire (*banyama*), as had already happened some years before to Cartmel Robinson, a colonial

administrator, during a vaccination campaign. Hunt (1999, p. 182) recalls how, in the Kisangani region of the Congo, these tales had a special name, *tokwakwa*:

> Nurses and their dispensaries were less menacing than the images of doctor touring with syringes to inject people and their tinned food to eat […]. The imagery of tinned food and bodily removals is closely aligned to a genre of terrifying stories known as tokwakwa that circulated in the region […]. They understood medicine through these tales of whites devouring black flesh.

It is essential to appreciate the reverberations and mutual distortions that opposed images of colonial medical knowledge (cannibal parties, doctors as vampires) to the representations of local medical knowledge and practices (charlatans, irrational beliefs, etc.) in an atmosphere of suspicion, deceit, intimacy and violence. Only by adopting a perspective that surveys the entire effect generated by what was an authentic "subversion of native signs" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, p. 252) can we assess the dynamics that contributed to reshaping local knowledge of healing and health, as well as the imaginary of sorcery. These memories might help interpret the widespread social anxiety concerning the body, not unlike the projective-persecutory interpretation of illness or other negative events that goes beyond any alleged culture-bound syndromes.

Nevertheless, it is, above all, the relation between the magical-therapeutic techniques connected with the powers of witchcraft (and the impossibility of separating them) and the historical-political horizon (that of the colonial situation, in the first place) that should be borne in mind. Two examples show the kind of articulation I have in mind. The custom of making whole villages invisible, and so save them from the attentions of the army or the colonial administrator, is a topos occupying many pages of anthropological literature. The episode recounted by Yattara and Salvaing (2003, pp. 25–26) concerning a village in Mali (Tambenì) is instructive. In their account, the famous marabout Alpha Amadou, not wishing to satisfy the requests of the French administrator Dongé, not only refused to welcome him or meet him but also decided to cast a spell that made the village invisible. No fewer than eight times, Dongé failed to find him, and eight times walked just a few meters away from him without seeing either

houses or humans. Alpha Amadou refused to go back on his decision, even when the inhabitants of the village, worn out by now as they were forced to go personally to the distant administrative office to pay their taxes, begged him to suspend the charm: Alpha Amadou did not desist, and Tambenì was to remain invisible. Similar stories are common in Cameroon too (Beneduce 2010a, pp. 156–157). A story I collected in Sangmélina in 2002 tells of a village made invisible to the German army thanks to a remedy (*biaŋ*) prepared by a sorcerer.

Making oneself invisible to an enemy, acting without being seen, making a whole village invisible, recall at once the characteristics of many representations of witchcraft. But they are also political actions, techniques put in the service of a people against the occupier in a symmetrical opposition of techniques and unlimited powers not very different from the strategies of "avoidance, trickery and flight" and '*escapisme*' described by Balandier ([1955] 1982, p. 162) and Bayart (2006, p. xlix), respectively. Magical-therapeutic knowledge is thus also a complex allegory of counterpowers and rebellion (not unlike the way beliefs are the expression of "countertheories" (Pavanello, in this volume)). At the same time, witchcraft was to provide a particularly rich semantic reserve for the 'nervous vocabulary' of the colony and its imaginary in the attempt to name and control experiences of terror and violence. Narratives by healers and their patients sometimes reveal this chaotic layering of chronotypes, images of violence, past memories and altered knowledge.

Harry G. West recalls how the massive attacks by Portuguese helicopters and airplanes in the territories of Mozambique liberated by FRELIMO were a matter of great interest to the local population. To those at the receiving end, their destructive power to houses, objects and people was just another expression (a 'colonial translation') of the violence and destructiveness associated with witchcraft and sorcery: for many, those helicopters had been called by the sorcerers, who piloted them from earth to increase their devastating effectiveness. In a significant inversion of the Cameroon scene referred to earlier, the sorcerers became the natural allies of death and colonial violence: "For some, even Portuguese troops were the product of Muedan sorcery […] Muedan sorcerers still used these instruments of violence to their own ends. […] Sorcerers used mines during the war. They didn't make these mines, but they could use *uwavi*, witchcraft, to make a person walk to the place were a mine had been laid by the Portuguese"

(West 2005, p. 155). Landmines took the place of the Zande barn described by Evans-Pritchard.

The other case I would mention is the use of the term ‘mystic’. By an unexpected, but not unique, metamorphosis, in Sub-Saharan Africa it passed from the vocabulary of the missionaries to that of traditional healers, referring to illnesses caused by witchcraft or to objects, remedies and other strategies used to heal (mystic wound, mystic sore, mystic bark, mystic taxi, mystic tomb, mystic arrow, mystic soap, mystic candle, and so on) (Beneduce 2013). This is just one more example of that “brilliant bricolage of symbolic objects and verbal utterances” described by the Comaroffs in South Africa (1992, p. 257).[17]

De Certeau has emphasized a feature of the mystic idiom of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe as illuminating some of the characteristics of the experience and discourse of healers in Central and Equatorial Africa. He writes: “The mysticism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries proliferated in proximity to a loss. *It is a historical trope for that loss*” (de Certeau 1986, p. 80; my emphasis). The loss to which de Certeau refers may only very cautiously be compared to that of the healers and the African therapeutic vocabulary and imaginary. More than an analogy, it may be recognized in the common feeling of loss that distinguishes their experience and discourse (“the objects of the mystics’ discourse” says de Certeau, “have the status of symptoms”; 1986, p. 88)

There was, then, a clash between different religious imaginaries and the process for disciplining them was inevitably imperfect. One eloquent example of how healing practices and rituals can be places of resistance is that of the cults and the appearance of new healers, as well as techniques designed to protect the population, which originated in response to a health problem, but often came to threaten colonial political power.[18] Feierman (1995, p. 75) gives a particularly valuable analysis, not only when he explores the significance of “social criticism” of the healing and prophetic cults in colonial Africa but also when he illuminates the difference between “spirits, mediums and diviners” on the one hand, and healers on the other:

> At the local level, they were concerned with the reproduction and survival of individual descent or kinship groups, or even of individual households: healers were concerned with the infertility of an individual

> woman, or the illness of children in a household, or the suffering and pain of an elderly man. But at a wider level some among them were also concerned with large-scale threats to survival and well-being: with epidemics and famines, with warfare and widespread diseases of cattle and with witchcraft.

Nancy Rose Hunt gives an effective analysis of the political value of local medical knowledge, coining the apt expression, "therapeutic insurgency" (2016, pp. 11, 63). This subject is important for various reasons. First, it obliges us to reconsider the too hasty equivalences between conventional and traditional medicine, which was the basis for no small number of cooperation projects. Nevertheless, its importance lies, above all, in recognizing other meanings in the 'taste for the secret' and the antagonistic dimension that still marks today the epistemological competition that opposes the speeches of the healers and the effectiveness of traditional therapies to the 'medicine of the Whites'.[19]

To accuse, to heal, to envision

The expression "age of confusion" (Peel 2000) is an effective description of the moral and epistemological uncertainty that accompanied the experience of conversion to Christianity. The overturning of preexisting experiences of the self and representations of evil ended up exalting simply the negative sense of the idea of sorcery. One of the effects of the truth that missionary discourse brought with it was to increase, rather than weaken, the truth of sorcery.[20]

As late as the 1970s, de Rosny could state that "when the nganga [healer] accuses, he heals", or that the designation of a culprit is "part of the therapeutic process".[21] Now, however, these theories need to take into account a social horizon marked by a dizzying proliferation of therapeutic actors (de Rosny 1996; Tonda 2002) but, above all, by the demonization that the Protestant churches incessantly encouraged. "If you are a good Christian, you must believe in the existence of Satan. And if you believe in Satan, you must believe in sorcery. And when a person behaves abnormally,

he is an agent of Satan" (says a member of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church to Birgit Meyer; 1994, p. 54).

If witchcraft continues to name and think of death, as de Rosny suggested, the idea that it also contributes to controlling the fears deriving from it (de Rosny 1981, p. 238) needs to consider a scenario of competition and uncertainty in which the discourses of witchcraft seem mainly to amplify anxieties, concerns and suspicions rather than contain them. Violence towards those accused of witchcraft, which sometimes – and not only in Africa – becomes an actual massacre (Siegel 2006), and the increase in trials in African courts for accidents or actual deaths attributed to witchcraft, show the limitations of an interpretative model that imagined witchcraft as the basis of an almost spontaneous social self-regulation of violence within a virtuous triangle, whose tips were the knowledge of the *nganga*, the family of the patient, and the alleged culprit.

What I particularly want to insist on in the remainder of this contribution is, however, another aspect, to illustrate which I return to the scene where I began. The ritual space in Donoban has the form of a genuine sacred topography. In the hours preceding the sacrifice briefly described earlier, the scene to which the patients are invited reveals the ideology of healing. The first phase of the ritual is celebrated at the foot of a tree that Ambainde tells me is inhabited by genies: the invocation of the spirits to free the sick person from evil and his aggressors. This is also the center of the melody Ambainde chants, accompanying himself with a one-stringed lute, every so often interrupting himself in the course of a complex liturgy. A woman sitting next to him is asking his help so that she may have a child. The healer proceeds, using a small blade to cut the skin of her forehead, arms and breasts. He then dips a small piece of cotton with drops of the blood trickling from the tiny cuts, and, after folding and refolding the material, nails it to the sacred tree. There are dozens of fragments of material visible on the bark that have been nailed there during previous treatments. In this way the sickness passes invisibly from the body of the sick to the tree, where it will remain fixed forever: the drops of blood are like a simulacrum of an offertory, and the fragments of material are the means by which the transfer of the sickness is effected. The logic presiding over his acts is clear: sickness, sterility or adversity is extracted from the victim's body and transposed to another body (a tree or animal). As with wealth or success, the circulation of sickness seems to follow the principle of a zero-sum game, in

the awareness that the sickness (the evil) never ceases to circulate: it can only change its place of berth (and so be fixed on the body of another sick person), but it can never be eradicated. Often, to explain this principle, healers have told me that one can contract an illness simply by stumbling on it (*enjamber la maladie*) – perhaps at a crossroads where the illness has been deliberately left, waiting for an unwitting victim to take it over and free another sick person. In this circulation of evil and mishap, we can recognize the mirror image of what Favret-Saada describes as the elementary law of sorcery and the fascination it exercises, partly by virtue of the fact that, in one way or another, everyone has experienced "situations in which there is no room for two, and that, in stories of sorcery, these take the extreme form of a duel to the death" (1981, p. 128).

The dawn has now given way to a pallid sun, whose rays are dimmed by the sand the wind has blown up. Ambainde crosses the compound, walking away from the tree, and, followed by the woman and another patient in a small, silent cortège, he comes up to a sacred rock, where he starts once again to sing his melody. The invocation describes the scene of a battle, during which the fetishes of the neighboring villages and the genies who live in the ravines, hills and rocks, and even the communities in the region, are all summoned to the common war against ill-doers and sorcerers. References to mythical and real places, historical or imaginary events, and contingent situations, are expressed through complex metaphors, in some respects close to "historical metaphors" and "geographical analogies" (Last 1980):[22]

> *Binu (totemic priest)* of Ondogou, Lord, receive this sick woman […]
> Genies young and old, put on the cap of war,
> The fight approaches, blood will flow like oil,
> Come men, and have strong sticks with you,
> Come to our aid.[23]

Along with medicinal plants, the sacrifices to the ancestors and the scarification, the healing is, first and foremost, a clash, a battle to undo the 'work of men' (the death plan of the sorcerer and of enemies) and overturn the negativity onto those who have caused it, neutralizing ('cooling' is the actual word in a later verse) the culprit.

Reading between the lines, we can trace another chiasmus in the background of the one just evoked, inverting the transformation that will shortly become sacrificial violence into a gesture of collective protection, and becoming violence once again in the course of which the healer turns the evil back upon its perpetrator. The world becomes once again a place of threats and hostile forces, incessant battles, where even the plan of wanting to know and 'see' what ordinary persons cannot takes on the significance of an ambiguous process. The figures of knowledge and death, the characters of the sorcerer and the healer, are once again confused with each other: "The ones who know for sure are themselves sorcerers" (Siegel 2006, p. 166; see also Favret-Saada 1981, p. 14).

De Rosny always distinguished between the healer and the sorcerer, but when he went to Abidjan for other reasons, he admitted to a sense of relief at being able at last to leave the "oppressive world of the nganga" (1981, p. 370), a world that sees the pupil as the future murderer of his master and that easily started suspecting de Rosny himself for the death of Din, who had initiated him into the world of "those who heal in the night".[24] The idea that innocence has no place ("can one love one's sorcerer?") in a society dominated by incessant conflict and that the universe of initiates is a "terrifying battle field" slowly but inexorably came home to de Rosny, particularly when he realized that being initiated into the world of the *nganga* means seeing the violence of the world. Though he regarded the healers as the sworn enemies of the sorcerers, in the end, he had to admit that traditional healing too was a "call to vengeance"[25] and that an irreducible contradiction opposes Christian principles to the aim of "returning evil for evil" (1981, p. 218).

Epistemological debris and 'hierarchies of credibility'. Conclusions

What consequences follow from the certainty that as the healer "functions as an antiwitchdoctor, he will be constantly suspected of becoming his opposite, as he perceives violence and plays with it" (de Rosny 1981, pp. 393–394)? What consequence is there for traditional medical knowledge from the fact that sorcery plays such a decisive role in it? And, lastly, what

epistemology of healing can we see in their techniques and their knowledge, when the active power sometimes seems what Last has called "a lack of knowledge"?[26]

Ambainde is nimble and alert in his movements, scrupulous in administering his remedies to his patients and has little interest in naming and classifying an illness, nor does he claim any special knowledge of the world. Rather, he wants to penetrate areas of uncertainty or 'non knowledge', where everyday existence totters before the siege of sorcery, family conflicts or, simply, the unknown.

The ethnography of traditional medicines and indigenous knowledge in general come up against considerable difficulties in these ways of operating, particularly when faced with the idea that their knowledge is not necessarily or always "about particular things or groups of things" but is often "a set of procedures for discovering the nature of the world and then modifying it in ways to make it more useful" (Ellen 1998, quoted in West 2006, p. 37).

The dialog between Livingstone and the rainmaker is exemplary in displaying this difference (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, p. 223). West reports a dialog with a Mozambican healer echoing these same issues:

> Julia's marks looked vaguely like Arabic script, even if she wrote from left to right. I asked about this […] 'Does it have meaning?' 'Yes,' she answered confidently. Then she smiled softly, adding, 'But *I* don't know what it means' ".
>
> (West 2006, p. 36)

In any case, it is this way of viewing the world and the insistence in wanting to look at what society, for its part, constantly dissimulates and conceals (its violence) that constitutes the healer's most authentic repertoire. His actions derive from this, even when everything would suggest the temptation to withdraw in the face of what seems nameless, what seems to repeat the violence and sorcery of history itself.[27] Sorcery is this overlapping of temporalities[28] and experiences in a painful, traumatic mixture that the healer combats, sings and mimes in the sacrificial gesture and attempts to heal. By its layered imaginaries and words, discourses on sorcery and witchcraft are like a "drive belt" that connects the "history of

society to the history of language".[29] On the threshold of this menacing world, this aporia, in this "nonpassage" (Derrida 1993, p. 12), he becomes the mediator of different forms of knowledge, memories and temporalities,

> at the point where the very project or the problematic task becomes impossible and where we are exposed, absolutely without protection, without problem, and without prosthesis, without possible substitution, singularly exposed in our absolute and absolutely naked uniqueness, that is to say, disarmed, delivered to the other, incapable even of sheltering ourselves behind what could still protect the interiority of a secret.
>
> (Derrida 1993, p. 12)

One day a woman came to Ambainde with a seriously ill, feverish newborn infant. Ambainde studied him, touched the fontanelle and began looking for a powdered medicine to dilute in water and give to him. He must have spotted my worried expression, given the quality of the water, as well as my puzzlement at what that remedy could actually do. Without a word, he put the child in my arms, inviting me, with a faint smile on his face, to do something. The child was by now almost unconscious, and his limp little body was almost insensible to stimuli. With no medicines and no possibility of taking him to a dispensary, the impotence of my knowledge was clear to see, and I was seized by a sense of unease under his mother's questioning gaze. Ambainde, by contrast, was as imperturbable as ever, used, as he was, to uncertainty in mediating between universes of healing and in crossing different fields of experience (those of sickness and death).

In any case, the threats do not come to the end on the threshold of a dispensary or a hospital. In a village of the Cameroon forest, in Bengbis, in the dispensary of the Catholic mission I had been visiting for several days, I learned one evening of the death of a child with whose mother I had been talking a few days previously. The child had died of meningitis, although he had been admitted to hospital and received antibiotics. In the dark silence of the forest, she could only be accompanied to her village some kilometers away from the mission. The first comments naturally associated the death with conflicts and suspicions within the family. In the car, she was mute, with the child's lifeless body in her arms. I could perceive clearly the siege

against which the healers are battling and how they try to control its menace by entering that space which, being invisible, is essentially, paradoxically, also unknowable.

Faced with a condition that often had no name or explanation, sorcery wholly occupies the space of social discourse on uncertainty and violence, in the sense that it saturates it. It is not the prelude to a future translation into other terms, it does not lead to another way of saying or understanding the event: quite simply, it takes its place, capturing that 'interminable' dimension that is at the heart of the idea of aporia.[30] That is why it remains difficult to explain or analyze, not only for the anthropologist but even for those who believe it exists (Siegel 2006, p. 21).[31]

On the Dogon plateau, sorcery is not a mere object of belief or an elegant metaphor. This is also patiently and insistently explained by the inhabitants of Mueda to Harry West when he tries to expound his viewpoint and translate into metaphorical terms of royal power the idea that the sorcerers kill after being transformed into lions ("metaphors don't kill the neighbors, lion-people do", West 2007, p. 25). If we insist on conceiving of sorcery only as a metaphor, we would run the risk of ignoring people's experience, the real anguish that they are familiar with, faced with threats and violence, and we might reproduce "hierarchies of credibility" not very different from those of the colonial era.[32]

Notes

1 The fieldwork started in 1998 and is still continuing. The research described here was conducted in January 2008.

2 Ibrahima Kassambara was a young Dogon of extraordinary ethnographic sensibility and great expertise, as well as infinite curiosity. His aim was to study traditional medicine and at the same time train as a health worker. A straightforward case of appendicitis killed him just after his 20th birthday, a few months after this interview, which was carried out in Donoban. I feel it a duty to mention his name in a paper that originated in those meetings and is in debt to his intuitions.

3 *Binu* indicates the figure of the priest responsible for the cult of the ancestors. Ambainde's father had built a small house for resting when he was possessed by the spirits, on the very spur of rock that is home to another small sanctuary, that of the *ya:pilú* fetishes.

4 In Donoban I counted no fewer than eight altars and fetishes, some designed to protect the whole village from hostile forces and enemies (*kalandiɛme*), others (*i-nambé*, "sons of mothers") to cure particular diseases (*ya:pilú*) or help fertility, still others to ensure the presence of water in the nearby source (of *Nommo*), etc.

5 The white is obtained from millet ground in water, the red ochre from the ferrous clay of the plateau, the black from fragments of pulverized coal.

6 Nohoum Guindo, an interpreter with a deep knowledge of Dogon ethnography, notes that the new statuettes are "less authentic" than the others, though I find it hard to draw conclusions from this observation on the value the various *dege dege* have for Ambainde.

7 "We recall the presumed etymology of *pharmakon*/*pharmakos*, detailed by Émile Boisacq in his *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*. '*Pharmacon*: charm, philter, drug, remedy, poison. *Pharmakos*: magician, wizard, poisoner; the one sacrificed in expiation for the sins of a city …; *pharmassō*: Attic, -*ttō*, work on or alter by means of a drug" (Derrida 1981, p. 132). On the 'martial' dimension of traditional therapies in South Cameroon, see Beneduce (2010b, 2013, 2016a).

8 On many of the aspects present in the idea of witchcraft in different societies of Cameroon, see, not only Mallart i Guimerà (1981), but also Beneduce (2010a, 2010b, 2012), de Rosny (1981) and Geschiere (1997). On relationships between religious experience and political discourse, see, among others, Ellis and ter Haar (2003) and Guyer (2007).

9 Pool (1994, pp. 12–13) gives an example of the many meanings of the term 'remedy, medicine' (*mcɛp*) among the Wimbum of Cameroon: "*mcɛp* objects" may be a porcupine's quills, feathers, heaps of leaves, thin layers of coagulated blood from objects sprinkled with the blood of sacrificed animals, cowrie shells, often combined to make anti-sorcery medicines, "hidden in almost every nook and cranny". The list also includes objects such as oval stones symbolizing unity of lineage, which are extremely important for migrants who return to the village periodically to make sacrifices on them (usually immolating a guinea fowl). It is through these objects that they remain in contact with their families when far away. Forgetting this duty may be at the origin of illnesses or other mishaps. Figurines belonging to secret societies (*juju*) are also often called *mcɛp*, and even objects from outside the area, such as knives received as a gift, can be given the same name. The idea of 'single twins' or '*mcɛp* children' is most relevant here: children born with the umbilical cord round their neck or shoulder, or by breech birth typically seem to have great energy and require much attention. They may become talented when they grow up (great leaders, famous musicians, renowned healers). Otherwise, they may become mad or sorcerers. The broad spectrum of meanings associated with the term *mcɛp* is partially unified in the idea of 'charged objects', to indicate objects as a whole (and people, in this case) possessed of powers able to influence people or events, proposed by Geschiere for another people of Cameroon (the Maka) and often adopted as an equivalent of the term fetish. For the many different meanings present in the notion of medicine (*muti*) in Zimbabwe, see Simmons (2006, p. 69). Another example is *ikakota*, or *bote* (colonial Belgian Congo): "An *Ikakota*, or *bote*, was a medicine, charm, magical practice, and also a tree. A human-made mixture of tree and plants, hair, nails, blood, and fragments of objects … *Ikakota* produced invulnerability" (Hunt 2016, pp. 49–51).

10 The term for sorcerer is usually replaced by a euphemism ('night walker', *yàŋa yálienɛ*), and sorcery is indicated by reference to the term poison (*dúgo*; while for the sorcerer the term used is *dugonɛ*: poisoner). On why the term poison is the usual term in Uganda to refer to sorcery, see Behrend (1999, p. 34). See also Beneduce (2016b).

11 On Dogon sorcery as the dark and malign side of medicine, see Calame-Griaule (1965, p. 159).

12 The work of Favret-Saada (1981, 2009) in Bocage shows how allowing the victims of sorcery to act and express their latent or unconscious aggression and pernicious feelings is a key part of the cure.

13 The formula was proposed by Ernesto de Martino in many of his writings to describe the experience of evil in Southern Italy, the sense of persecution that dominates the sick person and, more generally, the condition of the subordinate groups who have the experience of something "endured, but not decided" (1995, p. 111).

14 See Roland Mba in the newspaper *Gabon matin* (11 June 2013, p. 3).

15 West relates a similar ambiguity in the perception of the healer among the Mueda (Mozambique): "*Vakulaula* [healers] are in fact assumed by Muedans to *be* sorcerers, for how could they see the destructive acts of sorcerers unless they were able to see as sorcerers see, to know as sorcerers know?" (West 2006, p. 37). On the other hand, the sorcerer (*gua*) described by Bubandt in Indonesia can be asked to heal a sick person: whether he refuses, leaving the village, or accepts (essentially admitting that he is a sorcerer), he is in any case caught in a trap (2014, p. 4)

16 During the liberation war in Algeria, the sale of antibiotics was forbidden to prevent their being used in healing the gun wounds of militants of the National Liberation Front, many of whom died in terrible agony due to the complications of tetanus.

17 The migration of this concept from Christian and missionary vocabulary to that of African sorcery and traditional medicine alludes, however, to another conflict: that between divine powers, represented by the missionaries, and human powers, reaffirmed through the language of sorcery. Ernesto de Martino had already noted how Bacon had underlined the gradual secularization of charm and sorcery, which were by then regarded as expressing "a mere psychological power" (2015).

18 Naturally, the healers' and prophets' role of criticizing political power was also to be found before the colonial era (Feierman 1995). De Rosny (1981) describes the antagonistic relation between the figure of the fortune-teller (*khamsi*) and royal power in Western Cameroon.

19 What Feierman calls public healers well illustrates the complexity of healing and its social meanings in Africa: "Looking at the larger picture of public healing in African history is like viewing a person's image as reflected in scattered pieces of a broken mirror. In some cases public healers appear for brief and dramatic moments, but seem to have few antecedents and to leave no legacy. These moments provide a glimpse of an entire world which, in other periods, is invisible. Such is the case when historians look at the history of Maji Maji rebellion in Tanzania. In 1905 a network of healers in southern Tanzania began to foretell the decline and defeat of the colonizers who were oppressing the region. This led ultimately to a huge rebellion. Histories of the movement report the role palyed by the healers; they discuss the spatial distribution of healing shrines in relation to the form taken by uprising" (Feierman 1999, pp. 187–188).

20 On the "pathology" of the colonial situation, see Balandier (1951). See Taussig, where, after evoking Gramsci and his idea of 'conviction', he cites Foucault, whose approach allows us to consider historically how "effects of truth are produced within discourses which are in themselves neither true nor false" (Foucault, quoted in Taussig 1987, p. 288).

21 Usually, the healer does not publicly accuse the alleged sorcerer, but even when he reveals his name, the family is relieved, according to de Rosny, because the danger is in its way limited, and the families "have structures that allow them to reintegrate the person accused". De Rosny felt able to conclude: "In my view, in this ambiguous search for a culprit who never really punishes [the accused person], the group protects itself from a decidedly more alarming threat: disintegration. It owes its relative peace to the system that allows the attribution of the responsibility [for evil] to one or other of its members" (de Rosny 1981, p. 239). This passage recalls Lévi-Strauss's reflections (1963, pp. 167–185).

22 In this connection, see Basso's research among the Apache Indians (1996).

23 The analysis of this text collected in 2008, consisting of more than 230 lines, is soon to be published. Apart from their role in therapeutic ritual, metaphors and place names are also explored as mnemotechnic systems.

24 It sometimes seems that his theoretical project of distinguishing the world of healers from that of sorcerers can only be achieved at the price of repression. When de Rosny (1981, p. 386) relates the speech of a healer on how he 'opens eyes' (i.e. gives vision to his pupils) and the price asked of those who want to 'see', the healer says some "require, to open eyes, a person [i.e. the sacrifice of someone to kill in the world of sorcery], others sometimes ask only for a goat". "I

think that the whole set of healing techniques as well as magic, witchcraft, and rituals could be defined as "technologies of the subject", according to Warnier's suggestion (2007, 2009)."

25 On the subject of vengeance, see also Stoller and Olkes (1987, pp. 110–113).

26 Reflecting on the topic of 'not knowing' among healers in Nigeria, Last (1981), in a famous article, points out how difficult it is for the ethnographer to research on it, as, particularly in an environment like that of traditional medicine, he is systematically driven to seek, annotate and interpret empirical knowledge, rituals and symbolic systems, almost entirely ignoring the areas of ignorance and conscious uncertainty in which the healers operate and that are often masked by recourse to the secret.

27 On the idea of 'history as sorcery', and how the past re-emerges in the therapeutic rites of shamans, see Taussig (1984, p. 87).

28 The expression 'overlapping of the temporal world' (*imbrication de temporalités*) is Jean-François Bayart's (personal communication).

29 Bakhtin adopts this metaphor when speaking about "speech genres" (1986, p. 65).

30 On these topics, see Bubandt (2014).

31 On the power of gossips and rumors related to sorcery, see also Stewart and Strathern (2004).

32 I am borrowing the expression 'hierarchies of credibility' from Stoler, though she uses it in a different sense. In particular, she suggests how the narratives and gestures of violence of the colonized influenced the experiences and discourses of the colonists and their texts, and how suspicions, documents, official acts or representations mixed in what she describes as authentic 'historiographical operations'. In this way, "Subalterns 'speak' throughout the European accounts only in muted voices, clipped words, distorted speech. But such ventriloquisms have a power of their own…. Here, rumor is a key form of cultural knowledge. In Deli, it was what people thought they knew, blurring the boundaries between events that could be claimed to have been 'witnessed' and those envisioned, between performed brutality and the potential for it" (2009, pp. 187–188).

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